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ABSTRACT

The first guide shows individuals how to organize a series of small-group discussions in order to help participants consider ways to prevent crime and violence in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Based on the concept of a study circle--small-group, democratic, and highly participatory--these groups bring people together to discuss important issues, find common ground, and develop new ways to solve problems. After some introductory notes on violence in the United States, an outline is provided for four study group sessions. Session one begins by asking how violence affects lives in the United States. In session two, discussants examine the reasons for violence in society, while in sessions three and four, participants examine what can be done to lessen violence in neighborhoods and schools. Each session features specific issues for members to address along with examples of approaches that have worked to reduce violence in some communities. Finally, further information is provided on the nature of study circles, suggestions on how to organize a circle on violence, and tips on how to lead and participate in a circle. Also provided are further readings on violence as well as resources for further action. The second guide is an abbreviated version of the first guide. (RJM)

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ED 373 303

Confronting Violence in Our Communities

A Guide for Involving Citizens in Public Dialogue and Problem Solving

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You are welcome to photocopy this publication as needed, or you can order additional guides from SCRC for $5.00 each, with discounts available for large orders. Also available is ***The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Violence in Our Communities***. The Busy Citizen's booklet, designed as a participant handout for discussion programs based on this larger guide, consists mainly of Sessions 1 through 4 of this booklet. This brief version, in a 5½ x 8½ format, is available for $1.00, with discounts available for large orders.

Foreword

Why talk about violence?

The purpose of this guide is to help you organize a series of small-group discussions that will help participants consider what they can do to prevent crime and violence in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

Study circles – small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions – have a venerable history in our nation's town meeting and Chautauqua traditions, and are once again taking root in many organizations and communities as a way to grapple with political and social concerns. They are an effective way for people to meet together to discuss important issues, find common ground, and develop new ways to solve problems.

Study circles on violence are valuable because they provide a flexible, democratic process that each community can adapt to its own concerns. As people meet with and learn from each other, they are building a sense of community that is basic to effectively addressing violence. Study circles also provide a way for citizens to become part of a dynamic campaign against crime and violence by giving them the opportunity to "own" the issue, analyze the problems, come to agreement, and jointly develop solutions.

Confronting Violence in Our Communities provides general information on the study circle process and lays out four discussion sessions:

Session 1 – How does violence affect our lives? provides an opportunity for participants to talk about their own experiences with violence and their concerns about violence in their community.

Session 2 – What are the reasons for violence in our society? encourages the group to look at the larger society and consider the question of the main causes of violence. This session lays out five different perspectives on the causes of violence, along with some action steps that could follow from each of the perspectives.

Session 3 – What can we do in our neighborhoods? is designed to help group members think about what they can do to reduce crime and violence in the homes and on the streets of their neighborhoods. It provides information about a number of successful violence prevention approaches around the country.

Session 4 – What can we do in our schools? helps participants address the question of what they can do about violence in their local schools. It describes some successful programs used in schools around the country.

Following the final session, there are additional readings on violence and a list of resources for further action.

This guide is designed to be flexible – adapt it and tailor it to the needs of your community or organization.

Whether you organize discussions within your institution or in the larger community, please tell us about your efforts. We can assist with your program and put you in touch with others who are organizing similar programs. Tell us about your efforts so that we can document the network of communities and organizations around the U.S. that are fostering productive dialogue on violence.

Confronting violence in our society will require the participation of many Americans in open, productive dialogue. We hope that this guide is useful to *your* participation.

Introduction

"There's a war on at home"

Violence has commanded the attention of the nation, inspiring fear, anger, and grave concern. In recent opinion polls, Americans have consistently put crime and violence at the top of the list of issues that trouble them.

Almost every day there is a story in the news about a multiple murder or some other senseless, vicious act. Many people agree that the media sensationalize violent crime and give people the idea that it is more rampant than it actually is, but few doubt that violence in our communities is a serious problem. Even though rates of violent crime might shift slightly up or down each year, we endure a great deal more violent crime than any other industrialized country in the world – and that doesn't seem likely to change anytime soon.

Violence has certainly become a political preoccupation, and violence or the threat of violence affects the daily lives of more people than ever before. For many people, personal safety has become a constant concern – they worry about something happening to them in the streets, at school, at work, even in their own homes. As *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter described the situation, "There's a war on at home.... Even outside major cities, ours is now a land of real freedom only during daylight and in certain neighborhoods" (*Newsweek*, September 27, 1993).

There is concern not only about the general level of violence, but about the *kinds* of violence that are on the rise. The fastest growth in violent crime is occurring among teenagers: From 1986 to 1991, murders committed by teens ages 14 to 17 grew by 124%, while among adults 25 and over, murder actually declined slightly (*Time*, February 7, 1994). And increasingly, young people face the fear of violence in their daily lives. In a 1991 survey, one in five high school students said that they carried a weapon to school at least once a month, for self-protection or use in a fight (Centers for Disease Control, 1991).

Violence in our neighborhoods

Over 2.9 million Americans were victims of violent crime in 1990. Local governments spent $39.7 billion on the criminal justice system in 1990 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992 and 1994).

Approximately four million American women are beaten in their homes each year (*The Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 1993). About one in four women is likely to be abused by her partner in her lifetime (*Congressional Quarterly Researcher*, February 26, 1993).

Four out of every 10 Americans "have changed their way of living" because of anxiety about drug-related crime (*The Christian Science Monitor*, April 8, 1994).

The following figures were compiled by the Children's Trust Fund in Massachusetts: 95% of child abusers were themselves abused as children; 80% of substance abusers were abused as children; and 80% of the Massachusetts state prison population were abused as children (*Boston Globe*, March 6, 1994).

Eight out of ten murders are committed by relatives or acquaintances of the victim (Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 1994). However, this proportion seems to be falling as violence becomes more random (*U.S. News & World Report*, January 17, 1994).

Violence against women is also a growing concern. Reported incidents of domestic violence have surged; more American lives – mostly women's lives – are lost to domestic violence every five years than in the entire Vietnam war. A study conducted by the National Victim Center revealed that 1 in 8 adult women has been raped ("Rape in America: A Report to the Nation," April 23, 1992).

Working to reduce crime and violence

Some elected officials are afraid to admit that the criminal justice system by itself can't control violent crime. However, growing numbers of mayors, judges, police chiefs, and other public leaders are acknowledging that citizens must become involved if we hope to make real changes. Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) has called for a "national rebellion" made up of citizens working against violence at the local level. (For excerpts from Senator Bradley's speech on this idea, see page 28.)

There are important reasons to be confident that citizens *can* make a difference in reducing violence. In addition to the overwhelmingly bad news that we see every day in the media, there is another side of the story: that of Americans coming together to examine the violence problem and to find ways to work cooperatively to solve it.

One hopeful sign is that there is growing agreement about the importance of confronting violence. Though different people emphasize different aspects of the problem – and different solutions – almost everyone agrees that violence *must* be addressed.

There is also a growing willingness to face violence openly. Where people might once have been afraid to confront the issue publicly, for fear of harming the local tourism industry or depressing property values, they are now realizing that something must be done – and that doing something requires broad-based public involvement.

The greatest reason for hope is that, in the past few years, citizens working together to confront violence have made a difference in their communities. Citizens, teachers, parents, young people, police, health care workers, elected officials, and other community leaders have designed innovative ways to address many aspects of the violence problem – substance abuse, domestic violence, gang violence, racial conflicts – within the settings of family, schools, social service agencies, religious institutions, and neighborhoods. Each of these approaches plays a part in reducing and preventing violence, and affirms that citizens can make a difference at the local level.

Violence in our schools

"In 1986, the last year for which we have reliable data, four to five people under 18 were murdered per day. Equally chilling, three to four people under 18 were arrested for murder every day" (National Crime Prevention Council).

In 1988, only 2 percent of the nation's 50 largest school districts used metal detectors. By 1993, 50 percent of them did (*Family Circle*, March 16, 1994).

A survey of 2,508 students in 96 middle and high schools by Louis Harris in the summer of 1993 found that nearly 60 percent of youngsters in grades 6 through 12 said they could get a handgun quickly. One third of those surveyed said they could get a gun within an hour. A 1991 survey by the Centers for Disease Control - which considers guns in schools a public health problem - found that 100,000 students across the country bring guns to school each day.

In Detroit, student assaults on teachers rose 900% from 1985 to 1990 (National School Safety Center).

Reducing crime and violence is up to us

We can't ignore or escape violence; it is spreading to communities that never before had to face it. Violence is a problem that can't be solved by police or politicians alone; working effectively to confront it will require the determined efforts of a great number of citizens over a long period of time.

Session 1

How does violence affect our lives?

The purpose of this session is to allow each group member to listen to others' experiences and perceptions. It gives everyone a chance to talk about how violence affects them and to gain a more complete picture of the violence problems our community is facing.

Violence is not always an easy topic to talk about. An understanding of and commitment to the study circle process – open, thoughtful, focused discussion – is essential. The core of the process is respectful listening in order to understand others' points of view.

The questions and cases below provide some starting points for a discussion about how violence affects us and our community.

Questions for beginning the discussion

1. How does the *possibility* of violence change your daily life? How has *direct contact* with violence affected your life?

2. What are your greatest concerns about safety and security, either your own or that of the people close to you?

3. How do you feel about local law enforcement and the protection it provides? Is the system fair to all? How does the way the police operate affect the behavior of people in the community?

4. How do your concerns about violence differ from the concerns your parents had at your age?

5. What do you think are the most serious problems involving violence in our community?

6. What role do you think the media have played in defining and portraying violence in our community?

7. In what ways do you think that citizens can make a real difference in addressing violence? What circumstances would prompt you to become actively involved in anti-violence programs in the community?

8. How does violence particularly affect the young people in our community?

9. How does violence particularly affect the women in our community?

Some cases for discussion

These cases are only brief sketches of some of the kinds of situations citizens face daily in communities all over the country. They are a starting point for thinking about the needs and concerns of people in our own community.

As you read and discuss the following cases, consider these questions: How are the cases similar to situations our community faces? What do you think are the root causes of violence in each case? What could be done to address the causes and to respond to the situation?

Case #1

A group of kids has begun to insult, intimidate, and pick fights with other students during and after school hours. As a result, many students are tense and scared. Some have banded together for protection, and a few have begun to carry

knives and even guns. In responding to the situation, a group of parents recently held a meeting and demanded that security in and around the school be increased. But there is no additional money in the school or police budget, and no one wants to raise taxes. The principal, who is concerned about the situation, has suspended the kids who have started the fights in school, but a lot of the incidents happen off school grounds. If you were the parent of a student at the school, what would you do? What would you want your child to do? What advice would you give to him or her?

Case #2

You have lived in the same urban neighborhood for a long time. Recently, you've begun to see a lot of different cars stopping in front of certain houses on your street, with people constantly coming and going. Your neighbor has told you that she has seen drugs and money change hands on the street; in fact, she says that she could identify two people who are selling drugs. One evening, she tells you that she went to a meeting of a new neighborhood group, and that members of the group have asked her to testify in court against the dealers. She is afraid that the dealers may "target" her if she testifies. What do you think your neighbor should do? Is there anything you would suggest to the neighborhood group?

Case #3

Domestic violence has increased dramatically in your small city over the past few years. In the past month, two women have been murdered by their ex-husbands and several others beaten so badly that they needed treatment at the hospital emergency room. The Women's Commission has good reason to believe that domestic violence is even more frequent, and requests the mayor to call a public meeting to hear suggestions and discuss what can be done to reduce domestic violence. The mayor knows that you are concerned about this issue, and has asked you to express your views at the meeting. What ideas would you suggest for reducing domestic violence?

Case #4

The office where you work is in a large building in an industrial area. The parking lot is large and poorly lit – you're not sure if people are always breaking the floodlights or if the company that owns the office building just isn't concerned about safety. In the last year, two people have been mugged while going to their cars after work. Incidents of "carjacking" have also been increasing in the surrounding area. What would you do, and to whom would you turn for help?

Case #5

Your suburban neighborhood is near a large city, but until the past year, violent crime had not been a major concern. Then, over the summer, several houses were burglarized. Two people walking home from the commuter station at night were assaulted and robbed. The police have arrested suspects in some of the cases, but the police force is small. Recently, the mayor created a Public Safety Committee to study ways to make the community safer. As a member of the committee, what proposals would you promote?

Session 2

What are the reasons for violence in our society?

Violence is a serious problem that makes people want to spring into immediate action. But there is an important role for discussion as a part of action: the discussion process itself builds a network of mutual support and commitment to the community. Discussion also leads to a deeper understanding of the problems and, so, to more effective solutions.

Violence: The public health approach

A growing number of violence experts have begun to characterize violence as a public health problem. Instead of blaming everything on a single root cause, the public health approach views a violent event as the outcome of many different causes over a long period of time.

This approach cuts across all five perspectives, and borrows ideas for solutions from each. It assumes that no single strategy will eliminate all violence, but that the chain of events leading to an act of violence can be broken at any of several links.

Advocates of the public health approach argue that anti-violence programs and approaches should be integrated and coordinated as a comprehensive strategy with many small constituent parts. Study circles are an ideal complement to this approach, since they bring the ideas and efforts of many different citizens to the mosaic of ongoing community efforts that the public health approach promotes.

Violence in America: Some international comparisons

The U.S. is by far the most violent industrialized nation in the world, with 3 million victims of violent crime every year and 23,000 murders. The second most violent industrialized nation, Spain, has a murder rate which is half that of ours (Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 1994). In 1993, 455 out of every 100,000 Americans were in jail at one time or another; we are the world leader in this category, with South Africa a distant second at 311 per 100,000 (*Time*, February 7, 1994). Guns are the murder weapon of choice: 16,567 people were killed with them last year in this country, compared with 10 handgun deaths in Australia, 13 in Sweden, 68 in Canada, and 87 in Japan (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1991).

However, international comparisons don't provide simple answers to the question of *why* violence occurs. For example, some argue that the prevalence of guns in this country is the cause, yet owning a gun is even more common in Switzerland than in the U.S., while their rates of handgun death – 91 per year – are much lower than ours. Some have explained American violence by noting other supposed differences between us and the rest of the world: we are less religious than other countries; we have more large cities; we are more competitive; we are less homogeneous and so have more clashes between different cultures. Yet rates of violent crime are higher in the American South than in the North, and the South would seem to be more religious, less urban, less competitive, and more homogeneous. There are no easy answers to the question of why the U.S. is more violent than many other countries.

Five perspectives on the reasons for violence in America

Rather than just compare the U.S. to less violent countries, it is important to try to understand the roots of our problem with violence and find ways to solve it. The five perspectives that follow offer a way to begin that discussion: they represent some of the most common explanations of our current problems with violence.

Each of the perspectives is an interpretation of the problem, a lens through which to view violence. The five lenses aren't necessarily mutually exclusive; you might find yourself drawing some elements from all or some of them. And because each depicts a broad view, each perspective could lead to a wide variety of action steps, some of which may directly conflict with one another. For example, looking at violence as primarily a problem of "law and order" (as in the fourth perspective) could lead to very different recommendations regarding handguns.

As you read and discuss the perspectives, consider these questions:

1. What do you think are the most important reasons for violence in America?

2. Are there perspectives not represented here that you think better account for why our society is so violent?

3. What role do drugs and alcohol play? What role do handguns play?

4. Some people believe that a moral or spiritual breakdown in our communities accounts for our problem with violence. How does this fit with your views?

5. Why is domestic violence so prevalent? Has it been getting worse, or are people just more aware of it now?

6. What do you think has led to the increase in violence in schools and among young people?

7. What general direction should we take for reducing violence in America? What are the greatest benefits we would derive from taking that direction? What kinds of sacrifices or costs could that direction require?

Drugs, alcohol and violence

All explanations of the violence problem touch in some way on alcohol and drug abuse. While not explicit in Perspective 2, for example, substance abuse might be seen as a final link in the chain of events leading to a violent incident. This idea could be supported by a 1990 study showing that one out of three victims of violent crimes claimed their assailant was under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or both (National Institute of Justice, February 1994).

The other perspectives in this session would emphasize the abuse of illegal drugs, and would describe that as a major symptom of the root causes and a uniquely complicating factor in its own right. For example, 39% of the murders committed in New York City in 1988 occurred during drug transactions (Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 1992).

Very different proposals emerge from these perspectives, ranging from escalating the "war on drugs" to legalizing certain drugs. Sessions 3 and 4 describe community-based approaches to substance abuse.

Guns and violence

The handgun debate dominates much of what we read and hear about how to solve the violence problem.

Gun control advocates assert that fewer firearms on the street mean fewer and less severe crimes. Handgun rights supporters claim that gun control takes firearms out of the hands of honest citizens and leaves criminals armed to the teeth.

There are powerful arguments on both sides, and the debate has been polarized for a long time. Few people really think that either outlawing all guns or making sure everyone has one and knows how to use it would render us a peaceful society overnight. And with the current stalemate over this issue, neither option seems likely to happen anytime soon.

The handgun debate has diverted attention from other aspects of the violence problem. While gun-related solutions (pro or con) may be part of the answer, most people see violence as a more complicated issue requiring more than one simple solution.

Perspective 1 – Violence occurs because of family and community breakdowns.

According to this perspective, community customs and standards once assured civility, discipline, and respect for authority. Violence was held in check by social principles and a sense of membership and belonging. Parents, extended family members, and neighbors cared for children, served as role models, and enforced codes of conduct. Cops "walked the beat" and institutions such as churches and schools provided communities with spiritual support, moral guidance, and a sense of discipline. Today, many children lack these influences. Many Americans don't feel ties to their community, don't live near other relatives, and don't know their neighbors very well. We should work to strengthen our families and communities.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Create or join neighborhood efforts such as community policing, crime watch, or community patrol.
- Make the school the hub of the community – hold community meetings there and get adults involved with students in the school.
- Look after kids in the neighborhood – by sharing child care or volunteering in programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters.
- Support a return to "old-fashioned values" in schools, with dress codes, the pledge of allegiance, prayer in the classrooms, and strictly enforced rules that compel respect for authority.
- Join a local community organization such as a neighborhood council, church group, Little League, parent-teacher association, or volunteer fire department.
- Support stricter enforcement of child support laws, so that "deadbeat parents" can't avoid their obligations.
- Join or start a support group for parents.
- Take part in programs that give citizens a voice in envisioning and planning the community's future.
- Promote substance abuse education and prevention, particularly for children.

Perspective 2 – Violence stems from pervasive cultural messages.

According to this perspective, violence is everywhere. You can't turn on your television, listen to the radio, read a novel, or even get into a conversation without encountering gratuitous violence or references to it. Most children will watch thousands of violent acts on TV before they reach the age of ten, but will not be exposed to nearly as many examples of people resolving their conflicts peacefully. Pornographic material portraying violence against women is freely available. These cultural messages convince people that violence is a legitimate option in many situations. The more pervasive violence becomes, the more "instinctive" it seems and the tougher it becomes to even know *how* to act constructively when a conflict arises. We should work to curb violent messages and provide people – especially kids – with tools for resolving conflicts peacefully.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Monitor and lower children's exposure to violence on television and in the movies.
- Create or support community mediation centers, which help to resolve disputes in schools and neighborhoods.
- Encourage local TV, radio, and newspapers to cover more of the positive events in the community, and to air public service announcements about anti-violence programs in the community.
- Support an expanded rating system for recordings to warn parents about violent lyrics.
- Restrict access to pornographic materials, and ban pornography that portrays violence against women.
- Punish fighting in sports at all levels; encourage good sportsmanship.
- Learn how to deal comfortably with racial, religious, gender, and other differences, and help teach others.
- Incorporate violence prevention and conflict resolution programs into the school curriculum.
- Help educate people about the connection between alcohol and violence, and ban alcohol on college campuses.
- Help educate people about the violent messages that war toys send.

Perspective 3 – Violence stems from the breakdown of cities.

According to this perspective, violence is not a disease randomly spread throughout society; it is linked mainly to intensifying inner-city problems. The more poverty, overcrowding, hunger, drug abuse, and gang activity there is in a community, the more violence there will be. Social and economic hardships have combined to create a culture of anger, helplessness, hopelessness, and despair in the inner city. Drug abuse and the drug trade represent the "last straw" in this process of breakdown. The young men who commit a large part of the violence are living by a grim street code that requires brutality and retribution in order to prove manhood and maintain respect. Violence is their only way to ensure that drug deals and other illegal agreements are carried out. We can't build walls around the inner city, so it is for the sake of all of society that we must solve the problems there.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Support economic development programs that increase employment opportunities in the inner city.
- Create or support a neighborhood program – for example, in the church, synagogue, mosque, local school, or community center – that reaches out to young people, teaches them about the dangers of gangs and drugs, helps give them positive peer and community support, and sponsors activities such as sports and music.
- Support assigning more police to the inner city and using the National Guard when necessary.
- Support community policing in inner cities.
- Promote treatment, detoxification, and counseling for alcoholics and drug addicts.
- Advocate the use of affirmative action to increase employment opportunities for minorities and those who live in poverty.
- Support local institutions in the inner city that cultivate racial and class consciousness and increase residents' political, social, and economic power.
- Legalize certain drugs, so that government can regulate the drug trade much as it does with alcohol, thus reducing violence.
- Support early intervention programs for young families.
- Advocate "regionalism": expand the tax base so that everyone who lives near a city (and therefore benefits by it) helps pay the cost of dealing with its problems.

Perspective 4 – Violence is due to a lack of "law and order."

According to this perspective, our society has become much more lenient than it used to be. Instead of swift and sure punishment, people who commit crimes know there is only a slim chance they will be arrested, convicted, and put in jail. Part of this is because the criminal justice system is overwhelmed and sometimes inefficient, but part of it is also due to excessive lenience. Even murderers receive furloughs or are paroled in just a few years. In schools, teachers are forced to put up with classroom behavior that would have been unacceptable in past generations. We don't do nearly enough to deter either children or adults from violence, to show them what the consequences are and make them "face the music" if they do something wrong. We should reinforce law and order by making rules and laws tougher and by strictly enforcing them.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Enact and enforce tougher sentencing for violent criminals and drug offenders – for example, by putting three-time offenders in jail for life.
- Acknowledge police brutality as a form of lawlessness, and call for the prosecution of the officers who practice it.
- Approve spending to hire more police and judges, build more jails, and send juvenile offenders to "boot camps."
- Support the use of mandatory drug tests to screen students and employees.
- Support vigorous enforcement of gun control laws to make it more difficult and expensive to obtain firearms.
- Encourage law-abiding citizens to arm themselves, and teach them how to use guns in self-defense.
- Support a return to "old-fashioned values" in the schools, with dress codes, the pledge of allegiance, prayer in the classrooms, and strictly enforced rules that require respect for authority figures.
- Learn martial arts and other self-defense skills.

Perspective 5 – Violence results from inequities and injustices.

According to this perspective, it is revealing that the victims of violence tend to be members of certain groups. These people – those who are poor, people of color, and women – are the very ones that have the least political, social, and economic power. They are more likely to live in violent environments – dangerous urban ghettos, abusive intimate relationships, impoverished Native American reservations, and the like. Though they experience different types of injustice, they all suffer to some degree from lack of opportunity, messages of hopelessness and resignation, the intolerance of others, and physical aggression. The deep frustration of people who feel powerless can in turn lead *them* to lash out in violence against their families, members of their community, and the "outside world." The justice system merely reinforces these inequities and injustices by giving harsher sentences to minority defendants, publicly questioning the character of rape victims, and giving police brutality "a slap on the wrist." The problem of violence will not be solved until the members of these groups have social, political, and economic equality.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Demand an end to police brutality and discrimination, and develop ways to make officers accountable to the neighborhoods they serve.
- Demand that the police department educate its street officers in racial awareness and prejudice reduction.
- Support affirmative action to obtain fair representation in business and civil service, and create council and congressional districts that make the election of black and Hispanic candidates more likely.
- Support community development programs that provide credit and capital to poor, female, and minority citizens who want to start businesses or buy homes.
- Advocate "regionalism": expand the tax base so that cities and suburbs, often divided along race and class lines, will share the costs as well as the benefits of urban centers.
- Launch a campaign against domestic violence, and educate health care workers and others to recognize and help women deal with it.
- Cultivate racial, class, and gender consciousness, and increase the political, social, and economic power of women, minorities, and those who live in poverty.
- Demand equity in school funding so that per-pupil classroom expenditures in poorer school districts are equal to those in wealthier districts.
- Promote treatment, detoxification, and counseling for alcoholics and drug addicts.
- Advocate the strict enforcement of fair housing laws.

Session 3

What can we do in our neighborhoods?

Violence has become a public concern in more neighborhoods than ever before. The purpose of this session is to develop ideas for preventing and reducing violence in our neighborhoods.

Note that though some of the approaches described in this session involve police or other law enforcement professionals, it is the level of citizen commitment, support, and participation that determines their success.

Community action: A "national rebellion against violence"

It is an American tradition for neighbors to come together to figure out how to solve problems. Unfortunately, when it comes to public issues, too many Americans have become alienated from government. They view government as a provider of services or a faceless bureaucracy that doesn't care to hear their opinions – "citizens" have become "clients" of the government. But, with violence and other signs of social distress on the rise in our communities, both citizens and government officials are realizing that the public must get involved.

In recent years, the violence problem has motivated a growing number of communities to act on that realization. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, there are well over 5,000 local community crime prevention programs in the nation. Those programs give credence to the idea that the best solution to violence is for citizens to meet on a regular basis, address the problems, devise their own creative approaches, and work together to build a cohesive community.

In May of 1994, Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey lent his voice to this idea by calling for citizen participation in a "national rebellion" against violence:

> "The only way to achieve our aim of a 75-percent homicide reduction within a decade and in a way consistent with our democracy is to assume individual responsibility to enlist all who love their communities and nation in a rebellion that is waged locally, neighbor by neighbor, building by building, and at the same time to build bonds of community that render violence moot."

The fifteen approaches to violence listed in this session are examples of this kind of rebellion. The list is not comprehensive or detailed, but it provides a starting point for thinking about methods we might want to initiate or build on in our community.

As you read and discuss the approaches in this session, consider these questions:

1. What are the main problems relating to violence in our neighborhood?

2. How have these problems developed over time? What does that mean about what we should do?

3. What is already going on in our neighborhood in terms of violence prevention and crime reduction? How can we assist in these efforts?

4. How have communities similar to ours effectively addressed problems like the ones we face? What can we learn from those efforts about new efforts we could initiate here? What do we need to research further?

5. What can we do about the specific threats faced by women in our neighborhood?

6. What first steps do we want to take? What type of support or help do we need to take these steps?

Fifteen approaches to reducing neighborhood violence

1) Conflict resolution. Disputes and tensions often fester because people see no effective way to resolve them. Communities can strengthen the abilities of their members to peacefully resolve problems by establishing conflict resolution and mediation programs that teach these skills and promote their use.

- San Francisco's Community Board program uses 300 volunteer mediators across the city to practice "neighborhood conciliation," handling cases brought to them by police, small claims courts, and city agencies.

2) Positive activities for young people. Communities have almost unlimited options when it comes to devising constructive activities for young people. These after-school, evening, and weekend programs give kids positive experiences in sports, business, the arts, and other areas. Service programs, in particular, lead students to understand their own effectiveness and place in the community.

- Milwaukee's Centro de la Comunidad Unida (United Community Center) sponsors basketball games from 8 p.m. until midnight, "when young people are most likely to be drinking or otherwise getting into trouble."

3) Drug and alcohol abuse prevention, treatment, and counseling. Many communities have seized upon reducing drug and alcohol abuse as a way of reducing violence. There are a great variety of programs neighborhoods can employ, including community-wide education efforts, counseling and support groups, "twelve-step" self-help programs like AlAnon, and treatment programs using drugs like methadone.

- The Neighborhood Support Centers in Little Rock, Arkansas, provide support services – including counseling, support groups, temporary shelter, and job training – to people who are on waiting lists for treatment programs or who are graduating from these programs.

4) Neighborhood crime watches. Effective neighborhood watch programs increase the reporting of violent crime and create an environment that deters crimes. Neighborhoods can strengthen their watch programs through extensive crime education programs (teaching people how to identify and describe incidents) and communications networks (such as a separate telephone number or radio channel) so that reporting is quicker and more effective.

- Boston's Senior Crime and Violence Prevention Project has helped police apprehend muggers and burglars through their Neighborhood Watch groups.

5) Neighborhood crime patrols. Citizens can go beyond merely reporting crimes and actually take to the streets to deter crime. Crime patrols can be very aggressive, holding nighttime marches or carrying video cameras around the neighborhood to record and disrupt prostitution and drug dealing. Or, they can take a subtler approach, persuading and assisting dealers and gang members to change their lifestyles.

- Reverend Charles Jones' aggressive patrol program in Macon, Georgia, reduced violent crime in the neighborhood by 23% and reduced calls for police service by 61%.

6) Community policing. Community policing assigns officers to a "beat" in a certain neighborhood, giving citizens the opportunity to make them part of the community. As opposed to merely

responding to violence, police become preventers of violence by responding to residents' needs, gathering crime prevention information, serving as role models for young people, and developing a cooperative relationship with people in the neighborhood.

- Providence, Rhode Island, has a successful community policing program in which officers work out of storefront offices in every neighborhood.

7) Education to improve race relations. Tensions between different ethnic and religious groups can incite or aggravate violence. There are effective ways citizens can address these tensions, from discussion programs to diversity seminars to cultural exchanges.

- The Los Angeles Black-Korean Alliance conducts cultural and pulpit exchanges, conflict mediation, and community meetings that explore ways to resolve cultural tension.

8) Parent education and support. Single parents, professional couples, and other parents have increasingly turned to parent education, training, counseling, and support groups. These services can be offered by schools, churches, universities, hospitals, nonprofit organizations, counseling centers, community groups, and government agencies.

- Parents Anonymous of Massachusetts offers counseling, a telephone hotline, and classes about fostering discipline and self-esteem in children.

9) Public information campaigns. Communities can use public information campaigns to address violence in general, or to specifically target street crime, domestic violence, or child abuse. These campaigns, which require the participation of a large number of citizens and organizations, work by increasing public awareness of the problem and advertising prevention techniques.

- The Sheriff's Department in Des Moines, Iowa, employs the local AARP, YMCA/YWCA, PTA, Boy Scouts, and Salvation Army, along with McDonald's, Hardee's, Wal-Mart, and Sears outlets, to spread crime prevention information.
- San Diego has a very active domestic violence awareness program: there are even billboards about domestic violence on the sides of buses. The domestic violence homicide rate has dropped 61% in two years.

Potential Anti-Violence Allies

citizens
community groups
police departments
local governments
churches
universities
community colleges
local schools
hospitals
social service agencies
student groups

10) Social services to prevent domestic violence. Communities can aid the victims of domestic violence not only by creating and supporting shelters for battered women, but by providing counseling services, support groups, legal aid, and child support.

- A Latina women's association in Chicago created a domestic violence program to enhance victims' self-esteem and coordinate the services they need. The program reaches 40 new women each month.

11) Social services to prevent child abuse. Nurses and social workers can visit homes to help detect and prevent child abuse. They can also counsel parents on how to prevent abusive situations from developing.

- The Violence Intervention Project for Children in Hartford, Connecticut, maintains a child abuse prevention staff. The staff is always on call so that they can make a home visit soon after an abusive incident is reported by police or neighbors.

12) Coordinated professional responses to violence. When police, courts, school officials, and other professionals see only their own sphere, no one sees the whole picture. Communities can use professional alliances to reduce this tendency. The police department, district attorney's office, and school administration can pool information in order to identify and keep track of first-time offenders, gang members, ex-convicts, and other people considered likely to commit crimes.

- Middlesex County, Massachusetts, has a criminal justice partnership in which school officials, police, and prosecutors share information on priority cases and devise joint strategies to keep repeat offenders off the streets.
- The Mental Health Association of Montgomery County, Maryland, organized a conference that brought together police, school counselors, social service workers, and juvenile justice system staff to coordinate child abuse identification and prevention efforts.

13) Volunteer police. Police departments can designate and train citizens as an official supplementary police force. Volunteers' duties increase the crime-prevention manpower of the community and help to bridge the gap between police and citizens.

- The Citizens Foot Patrol in Portland, Oregon, puts volunteers on the streets 24 hours a day; there has been a 80% crime reduction in the neighborhood where the Patrol operates.

14) Gun buy-backs and public information campaigns. Many communities have used public information and gun "buy-back" campaigns to persuade people in their communities to give up handguns. By persuading people that guns are too prevalent, these efforts may lead to more restrictive legislation, but their most direct effect is to get guns off the streets and out of homes, and to discourage people from buying more guns.

- New York City's gun buy-back campaign rewarded people who turned in handguns with tickets to New York Knicks games.

15) Handgun safety and awareness. Training citizens to use handguns safely and wisely can be done at the community level. While both supporters and opponents of gun control might support this concept, their training programs reflect different attitudes toward handguns.

- To reduce reckless handling of firearms, the *Orlando Sentinel* and the Orlando Police Department organized a program that trained more than 2,500 people to shoot.
- The Pediatricians' Project of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence works with health professionals to alert parents to the dangers posed by keeping a gun at home.

Session 4

What can we do in our schools?

The growing incidence of youth crime and gun possession and the local reality of escalating school violence of all kinds – from fistfights and sexual harassment to shootings – has prompted many parents and other citizens to take action against violence in the schools.

The purpose of this session is to develop ideas about concrete steps we can take – as parents, teachers, students, concerned citizens, and members of community organizations – to make our schools safer and to effectively use them in the fight against youth violence.

Defending our most important institution

There are well-established ways for parents to become involved in the schools, including parent-teacher associations, booster clubs, and other groups. Parents, grandparents, and other citizens regularly contribute to schools by coaching sports teams, mentoring and tutoring students, and participating in class activities. A renewed commitment to the spirit and practice of parent involvement in schools is needed now more than ever to counteract the violence in our schools.

Some of the most successful approaches to school violence are described in this session. Of course, no single program can solve the problem – as many educators assert, concerned parents and citizens must work with teachers and administrators to develop a caring community in which people work to develop creative solutions to violence.

As you read and discuss the ten approaches in this session, consider these questions:

1. What are the main problems relating to violence in our community's schools?

2. How have these problems developed over time? What does that mean about what we should do?

3. What is already going on in our community's schools to address violence? How can we assist in these efforts?

4. How have schools similar to ours effectively addressed problems like the ones we face? What can we learn from these efforts about new programs we can initiate here? What do we need to research further?

5. What first steps do we want to take? What type of support or help do we need to take these steps?

Ten approaches to preventing or reducing violence in our schools

1) Violence prevention education. A curriculum developed by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith of the Harvard Medical School shows students that violence isn't inevitable. It has been used around the country, and some communities have created their own versions. Some take this approach with very young children, in the belief that violence is learned very early on. In conjunction with putting a curriculum in place, some schools identify and work closely with students who are most at risk.

- The Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in Seattle helps children learn social skills that reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior.

2) Peer mediation. When it comes to resolving conflicts, young people often react most positively to their peers. Some schools take advantage of this by training students to mediate disputes. Students, teachers, administrators, and even police can make referrals to peer mediators.

- The peer mediation program at DuVal High in Prince George's County, Maryland, has reduced suspensions and fights by half since its inception three years ago.

3) Positive adult role models. Schools can bring in many different people as role models – such as parents, community activists, police officers, businesspeople, and athletes. It is important for adults to talk to younger people, listen to them, and to establish relationships with them.

- The Jacksonville, Florida Sheriff's Office has a Youth Intervention Program which links 12- to 18-year-olds with police officers who can build relationships with them.
- The North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence administers a School Resource Officer program in which police officers are assigned to full-time teaching positions in schools. instructing kids in substance abuse prevention, conflict mediation, and law enforcement procedures.

4) Child abuse awareness and prevention. Schools can make reducing child abuse an important and prominent public priority. Regular appointments with nurses at the schools can aid in the detection of abuse. Schools can train teachers, parents, and students to identify signs of abuse, or to show students what to do if they themselves are being abused.

- The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse runs a "Spider-Man" program in which the comic book hero makes presentations to kids on how to protect themselves and each other from abuse.

5) Peer leadership. Some of the most positive and compelling role models for young people are older students. Students can be trained to share their wisdom with classrooms of younger kids, or to mentor younger kids in one-on-one situations. Older students usually know the plight of younger students better than anyone else.

- The Peer Leadership Program, managed by the student government at Kennedy High School in Plainview-Old Bethpage, New York, trains students in teaching skills, interacting with younger children, and preventing crime. The students who are trained then teach elementary students.

6) Increased security and order at school. Parents can help their schools keep control of the building by volunteering to patrol hallways and routes to school. Police officers and metal detectors on campus can aid physical safety; also, schools can create an atmosphere of discipline and order by requiring students to promptly remove graffiti, enforcing stricter rules on gang-related clothing, and setting well-defined standards for respectful behavior and language.

- In New York City, violent incidents in schools with metal detectors have declined by 58% since the devices were introduced in 1988.

7) Race relations education. Schools can respond to the racial and ethnic tension that sometimes leads to violence by creating programs which teach students how to handle cultural differences. Students can study other cultures, learn about each others' backgrounds, talk openly about differences and commonalities, and have after-school opportunities to interact with people of different racial and ethnic groups.

- Students at Newton North High in Massachusetts formed Ethos for Equality, which coordinates leadership retreats, forums, workshops, and mediation programs focusing on cultural differences.

8) Gun safety and awareness. Children are often unaware of the importance of gun safety. Schools and communities can teach young people what to do when they come into contact with firearms. Training can decrease the risk of accidents involving young people and foster a responsible attitude toward handguns throughout life.

- The Dade County (Florida) Gun Safety Awareness Program provides students in all grades with skills and procedures for avoiding firearm accidents.

9) Substance abuse education and prevention. Schools can choose from a variety of successful substance abuse programs. Minimizing substance abuse among young people reduces violence in two ways: it diminishes one of the most common contributing factors in violent incidents, and it decreases the demand on which violent drug dealers thrive.

- Teens Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse is a program in the Evansville, Indiana, junior high schools in which teenagers use puppet shows to teach elementary school children about substance abuse.

10) Targeting gang violence. In a growing number of schools – urban, suburban, and rural – youth gangs are the most destructive symptom of the violence problem. By explicitly addressing gang violence, schools can combine a variety of approaches into a comprehensive gang prevention plan.

- The Youth Gang Unit in the Cleveland Public Schools serves as a specialized resource team. It educates students and parents on gang prevention, administers constructive after-school activities for students, and serves as a liaison between the police department and the school system.

What is a study circle?

A dozen people are comfortably seated around a living room or meeting room, one speaking, several others looking like they would like to make a point, one skimming an article as if searching for a particular item, another scanning the group, and the others listening attentively. This is a study circle in action.

A study circle is made up of 5–15 people who agree to meet together several times to learn about a social or political issue in a democratic and collaborative way. Complex issues are broken down into manageable subdivisions, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Reading material serves to catalyze the discussion and provides a common reference point.

Philosophy and background

As an informal, practical, and effective method for adult learning and social change, the study circle is rooted in the civic movements of 19th century America, and the use of study circles and similar small-group discussion programs is growing rapidly in the United States and many other places around the world.

Study circles are voluntary and highly participatory. They assist participants in confronting challenging issues and in making difficult choices. Study circles engage citizens in public and organizational concerns, bringing the wisdom of ordinary people to bear on difficult issues. Cooperation and participation are stressed so that the group can capitalize on the experience of all its members.

The study circle is small-group democracy in action. All viewpoints are taken seriously, and each member has an equal opportunity to participate. The process – democratic discussion among equals – is as important as the content.

Roles

The study circle leader is vital to the group's success. The leader makes sure the discussion is lively but focused. He or she models respectful listening and encourages participants to share their knowledge, experiences, and opinions. Some people find it helpful to share this task with a co-leader.

The study circle organizer – who may be the same person as the leader – selects the reading material, recruits participants, arranges the logistics for the meetings, and chooses the discussion leader.

Participants, whose commitment and interest are essential for a study circle's success, ultimately "own" the study circle. Their clear understanding of both their role and the leader's role helps create a democratic and collaborative environment.

Goals

The goal of a study circle is to deepen participants' understanding of an issue by focusing on the values that underlie opinions. Perhaps the most important question a study circle leader can ask is: "What experiences or beliefs might lead decent and caring people to support that point of view?" The group works through difficult issues and grapples with the choices that society or their organization is facing. Study circles seek "common ground" – that is, areas of general agreement – but consensus or compromise is not necessary.

Study circles differ from typical meetings in that they do not begin with a specific desired outcome. *Deliberation* is the goal. However, study circles often lead to social and political action, both by individual participants and by the group.

Suitability to a variety of organizations

Churches and synagogues, civic and community groups, businesses, advocacy organizations, schools, and unions – as well as citywide coalitions including a variety of organizations – have all used study circles to help their members consider vital issues. Sponsorship of study circles provides opportunities for members to gain knowledge, empowerment, and improved communication skills in an enjoyable and challenging setting.

Variations on the basic format

There are many variations on the basic format for a study circle. Though ideal study circles meet once a week for at least three sessions, other schedules can also work well. Some groups may want to combine a study circle with their regular monthly meetings. For those groups that cannot meet regularly, a workshop format can be used at a conference or a retreat, with the entire study circle taking place in one or two days.

Videotapes or audiotapes as well as written material can be used to spark discussion. Small-group activities and exercises are included in some study circles to add variety to the sessions.

The strength of the study circle is its flexibility. Every group's situation is unique, and study circle organizers are encouraged to adapt the basic format to the needs and goals of their community or organization.

Organizing study circles on violence

One of the outstanding characteristics of the study circle is its versatility. Whether you are organizing one discussion group or developing a large-scale program that will consist of many study circles, you will need to answer certain questions about the design of your program:

- What will you use for core reading materials? Will you use some or all of the sessions from this guide? Will you adapt or augment the four sessions to suit your particular situation?
- How many times will your group(s) meet?
- Who will lead the discussion(s)?

Planning a small-scale program

You may simply bring together a small group of friends and neighbors for several evenings of discussion. Or, you may want to organize study circles within an organization to which you belong, such as a neighborhood association; crime watch; church, synagogue, or mosque; workplace; parent-teacher association; community college; or university.

You may also want to think about how your study circles can lead to concrete steps to reduce and prevent violence. Whom would you need to invite to the study circle program? How can you encourage participants to look for necessary resources or engage other people in addressing violence? How can you get coverage of the study circles in the news media? How can you bring the local government and the police department into the process?

Planning a large-scale program

Mayor's offices, local government agencies, coalitions of community organizations, and newspapers are ideal organizers of large-scale dialogue on public issues. Confronting violence is at the top of the agenda in many communities, and community-wide study circles provide a practical format for encouraging citizen understanding of and involvement in this important issue.

If there are already neighborhood associations, crime watch groups, or community policing districts in the community, you can integrate study circles into those existing structures. Churches and synagogues, urban leagues, YMCAs, YWCAs, and other community organizations can be key in organizing large-scale study circle programs.

To ensure the maximum amount of publicity, involvement, and success for your program, consider these basic steps:

- Bring together a diverse working group of community leaders who are committed to fostering dialogue as a way to address violence. Introduce them to the study circle process, perhaps by conducting an actual study circle on violence with these people as participants.
- Hold a "kickoff" program in which your working group makes the call for dialogue to potential study circle leaders and "second-tier" organizers, and helps people understand the value of participation.
- Invite the local media to cover your program.

- Hold a training session for discussion leaders. The continuing education department of a nearby college or university, the community leadership organization in your city, or community educators may be able to organize this facet of your program.
- Recruit participants from a broad cross-section of the community. Include people who are involved in schools and the criminal justice system. Study circles that are diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, age, and occupation are particularly rewarding for the participants.
- Set study circle dates within a specific time period so that all of the study circles are going on around the same time.
- Give careful consideration to how local government can respond to the study circles. How can citizen involvement in the study circles result in citizen involvement in implementing the ideas that emerge from the study circles?

For more information on existing programs that may serve as models for your effort, please contact the Study Circles Resource Center. We will provide assistance and refer you to additional resources for your planning.

Leading a study circle

The study circle leader is the most important person in determining the program's success or failure. It is the leader's responsibility to moderate the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points, and managing the group process. While doing all this, the leader must be friendly, understanding, and supportive.

The leader does not need to be an expert. However, thorough familiarity with the reading material and previous reflection about the directions in which the discussion might go will make the leader more effective and more comfortable in this important role.

The most difficult aspects of leading discussion groups include keeping discussion focused, handling aggressive participants, and keeping one's own ego at bay. A background of leading small-group discussions or meetings is helpful. The following suggestions and principles of group leadership will be useful even for experienced leaders.

• **"Beginning is half," says an old Chinese proverb.** Set a friendly and relaxed atmosphere from the start. A quick review of the suggestions for participants will help ensure that everyone understands the ground rules for the discussion.

• **Be an active listener.** You will need to truly hear and understand what people say if you are to guide the discussion effectively. Listening carefully will set a good example for participants and will alert you to potential conflicts.

• **Stay neutral and be cautious about expressing your own values.** As the leader, you have considerable power with the group. That power should be used only for the purpose of furthering the discussion and not for establishing the correctness of a particular viewpoint.

• **Utilize open-ended questions.** Questions such as, "What other possibilities have we not yet considered?" will encourage discussion rather than elicit short, specific answers and are especially helpful for drawing out quiet members of the group.

• **Draw out quiet participants.** Do not allow anyone to sit quietly or to be forgotten by the group. Create an opportunity for each participant to contribute. The more you know about each person in the group, the easier this will be.

• **Don't be afraid of pauses and silences.** People need time to think and reflect. Sometimes silence will help someone build up the courage to make a valuable point. Leaders who tend to be impatient may find it helpful to count silently to 10 after asking a question.

• **Do not allow the group to make you the expert or "answer person."** You should not play the role of final arbiter. Let the participants decide what they believe. Allow group members to correct each other when a mistake is made.

• **Don't always be the one to respond to comments and questions.** Encourage interaction among the group. Participants should be conversing with each other, not just with the leader. Questions or comments that are directed to the leader can often be deflected to another member of the group.

• **Don't allow the group to get hung up on unprovable "facts" or assertions.** Disagreements about basic facts are common for controversial issues. If there is debate over a fact or figure, ask the group if that fact is relevant to the discussion. In some cases, it is best to leave the disagreement unresolved and move on.

• **Do not allow the aggressive, talkative person or faction to dominate.** Doing so is a sure recipe for failure. One of the most difficult aspects of leading a discussion is restraining domineering participants. Don't let people call out and gain control of the floor. If you allow this to happen the aggressive will dominate, you may lose control, and the more polite people will become angry and frustrated.

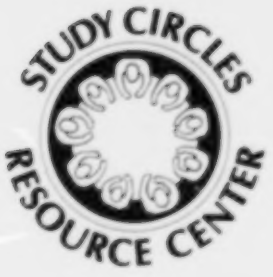
• **Use conflict productively and don't allow participants to personalize their disagreements.** Do not avoid conflict, but try to keep discussion focused on the point at hand. Since everyone's opinion is important in a study circle, participants should feel safe saying what they really think – even if it's unpopular.

• **Synthesize or summarize the discussion occasionally.** It is helpful to consolidate related ideas to provide a solid base for the discussion to build upon.

• **Ask hard questions.** Don't allow the discussion to simply confirm old assumptions. Avoid following any "line," and encourage participants to re-examine their assumptions. Call attention to points of view that have not been mentioned or seriously considered, whether you agree with them or not.

• **Don't worry about attaining consensus.** It's good for the study circle to have a sense of where participants stand, but it's not necessary to achieve consensus. In some cases a group will be split; there's no need to hammer out agreement.

• **Close the session with a brief question that each participant may respond to in turn.** This will help the group review its progress in the meeting and give a sense of closure.



Suggestions for participants

The goal of a study circle is not to learn a lot of facts, or to attain group consensus, but rather to deepen each person's understanding of the issue. This can occur in a focused discussion when people exchange views freely and consider a variety of viewpoints. The process – democratic discussion among equals – is as important as the content.

The following points are intended to help you make the most of your study circle experience and to suggest ways in which you can help the group.

• **Listen carefully to others.** Make sure you are giving everyone the chance to speak.

• **Maintain an open mind.** You don't score points by rigidly sticking to your early statements. Feel free to explore ideas that you have rejected or failed to consider in the past.

• **Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you.** Your own knowledge is not complete until you understand other participants' points of view and why they feel the way they do. It is important to respect people who disagree with you; they have reasons for their beliefs. You should be able to make a good case for positions you disagree with. This level of comprehension and empathy will make you a much better advocate for whatever position you come to.

• **Help keep the discussion on track.** Make sure your remarks are relevant; if necessary, explain how your points are related to the discussion. Try to make your points while they are pertinent.

• **Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the discussion.** If you tend to talk a lot in groups, leave room for quieter people. Be aware that some people may want to speak but are intimidated by more assertive people.

• **Address your remarks to the group rather than the leader.** Feel free to address your remarks to a particular participant, especially one who has not been heard from or who you think may have special insight. Don't hesitate to question other participants to learn more about their ideas.

• **Communicate your needs to the leader.** The leader is responsible for guiding the discussion, summarizing key ideas, and soliciting clarification of unclear points, but he/she may need advice on when this is necessary. Chances are you are not alone when you don't understand what someone has said.

• **Value your own experience and opinions.** Everyone in the group, including you, has unique knowledge and experience; this variety makes the discussion an interesting learning experience for all. Don't feel pressured to speak, but realize that failing to speak means robbing the group of your wisdom.

• **Engage in friendly disagreement.** Differences can invigorate the group, especially when it is relatively homogeneous on the surface. Don't hesitate to challenge ideas you disagree with. Don't be afraid to play devil's advocate, but don't go overboard. If the discussion becomes heated, ask yourself and others whether reason or emotion is running the show.

• **Remember that humor and a pleasant manner can go far in helping you make your points.** A belligerent attitude may prevent acceptance of your assertions. Be aware of how your body language can close you off from the group.

Readings on violence

Violence 'Somewhere Else' May Be Closer Than You Think

by Jeff Rivers

Shots ring out and people die because fate placed them between someone with a gun and someone or something the shooter thought should be shot. It happened to 7-year-old Marcellina Delgado of Hartford last month. So sad.

Predictably and rightly, we consoled the bereaved. We shook our fists at the killers. We said we wouldn't take it anymore. We marched to heaven knows where, chanting for peace. After all, we're good people, and we know that what's happening in some neighborhoods is bad.

Still, despite all our anguish and tears, all but the most heroic community activists, those who struggle to stem the violent tide each day, have accepted deaths like Marcellina's, here and across the country. We've accepted those withering accidental deaths, along with the carnage in which our young people kill others they believe are *supposed* to die.

We have accepted the young men buried in untied sneakers. We have accepted whole families and entire sections of cities unraveling. We have accepted it all. We have accepted it by telling ourselves that we are powerless to make things better, though folks are making things better all the time. (The FBI Uniform Crime Report shows violent crime down nationally for the first six months of 1993 compared with the same period in 1992.)

We have accepted it because, for the most part, it's someone else's neighborhood and someone else's children. And we hope it's going to stay that way.

Perhaps it will. Though the fear of violent crime is rampant and universal in our country, the people who are hardest hit by violent crime have largely been consigned to reservoirs of despair in cities in decline. Many of those bleak outposts are distanced from society's mainstream by a dam of indifference, fear or even hostility. But how long will the dam hold? How much of our humanity is eroded each time the violent tide we want to believe rages only outside our ramparts is repulsed by the dam?

When I was about 11 years old, a fight broke out on my street in Philly in the middle of the night. For the most part, it was a solid street composed of solid families. But things were changing. And many people were planning to move out before things got too bad.

The sounds of punches landing rolled down the street, chased by frantic footfalls and angry voices. Windows flew up. Doors opened. The neighbors looked out.

I'll never forget what I saw from my third-floor window.

The street was clear except for one young man careening from one side of our small street to another. Apparently the other combatants had raced around the corner.

The man looked from house to house. He told all the onlookers they should shut their windows or close their doors – he and his gang were running our street.

Although I don't think anybody had ever seen this guy before, everyone did as they were told. Windows were shut. Doors closed. A street died. Just like that. Some guy nobody had ever seen before said he was in charge of our block and our shut windows and closed

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doors shouted we'd accepted his premise. And a street died. Right then and there.

Nearly 20 years later, I discovered that my sense of being a good neighbor had died along with my street that night.

I was living in a gentrifying enclave of Brooklyn, N.Y., and what I thought was a fight broke out on the street five floors below. It was late and I was tired. This time, I didn't even look out the window. I was safe and my wife was right next to me. As I drifted off to sleep, I heard one of the belligerents yelling, "C'mon. C'mon."

The next day, I found out that it wasn't a street fight but a violent robbery I'd heard. The person who'd been robbed lived across the hall from me. If I had known it was the gentle filmmaker being robbed and not a group of punks I was willing to let bash each other's heads in, I'd have tried to help him. At least, that's what I told myself.

My neighbor later explained that he was being beaten so badly that he could think of nothing else to say to his attackers but "C'mon, c'mon. Hit me again."

The people who robbed him stole his keys. A few days later, they robbed his apartment - the apartment that was across the hall from mine. The robbers came in and rolled up my neighbor's rugs and unplugged his television set and carried them right out the front door. Who cared enough to stop them? Would anyone have cared enough about the robbers to suggest another way for them to live? How safe do you think I felt then? How safe do you feel now? ■

The following excerpts are from a speech given by Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, on May 11, 1994. Excerpted and reprinted by permission.

...The emerging federal crime bill is an attempt to counter rising violence. Its architects have worked hard and it does many good things, but its effect, in my view, is uncertain. It is a huge heap of ideas and proposals cobbled together by representatives of a nation which is increasingly desperate about violence. In a way, it reminds me of what a group of anxious citizens would do as they threw furniture and household goods onto a barricade to stop the invading hoards. Many of the provisions appear to have the following rationale: "Well, maybe that would work; maybe it would help. So let's add it to the barricade." My fear is that the remedies come from so many different places and expand over such a wide area, it will have limited impact - notwithstanding our good intentions.

What is missing is an overall national goal and an admission that much of what must be done is beyond the reach of the federal government.

We need a national rebellion against violence that sets a specific target for reducing violence over ten years. For example, I suggest a 75-percent reduction in our homicide rate, which if achieved would place us at about England's homicide rate of today. A national rebellion against violence would be rooted in the knowledge that violence strikes at the core of our democratic freedoms. It would also give us some way to measure progress. So often Americans, on the one hand, seem catatonic in the face of violence and, on the other hand, ready to entertain the most radical solutions to stop violence. Unless we have a way to tell whether what we're doing is working, people will assume the worst and we will be caught in a spiral of extreme measures, perhaps endangering our rights permanently. We cannot simply replace a violent society with a repressive one. That would be a pyrrhic victory. The rebellion against violence must enhance our national example, not diminish it. We must always remember that the world is watching us more than ever before.

Like so many other issues in public life, in the debate about violence, people don't listen to each other. They are frozen in the dichotomy between conservative or liberal, tough or coddling. Those who believe the answer is gun control don't listen to those who want the death penalty. Those who believe severe punishment is the answer can't see the necessity of limiting guns. And often neither gun control advocates nor tough sentencers see the connection between societal violence and poverty, family disintegration, and exploitative media violence. Instead of confronting reality, more and more people look for the magic bullet that will stop violence dead in its tracks. The truth is much, much harder.

Truth #1: There is no miracle cure, and the answer lies closer to home than to Washington, D.C.

Truth #2: Violence will not be stopped by soft words. Every person who uses violence must pay the price in lost freedom, and "doing time," especially for the young, must be a memory that one doesn't ever want to repeat.

Truth #3: We will never counter violence unless we restrict the handguns used in 80 percent of America's gun murders. What is common sense to people of virtually every other country in the world becomes a Constitutional crisis for us.

Truth #4: There is no substitute for a job. If we can move those on the bottom of the economic ladder up just a few rungs, our efforts against violence will have acquired a powerful ally.

Truth #5: Violence is a phenomenon caused by twisted values and the loss of self-control. The formation of values and self discipline begins in childhood, and teaching them is the job of parents. Unless we instill them in all our children, we have only ourselves to blame.

Truth #6: We need to make it as unfashionable to sell violence in America as it is to smoke cigarettes. We don't need censorship; we need enhanced citizenship, particularly in the board rooms.

Truth #7: Drugs and violence go together like gunpowder and a match. To ignore addiction as a national problem is to sentence many more Americans to death.

Those are the truths.

A national rebellion against violence requires individuals, communities, and all levels of government working together. Why? Because people don't live in isolation. They live in communities where they go to church, play sports, pick up groceries, and raise their children. Often these days they live in fear. What they don't realize is the power they possess if they work together. In the 1960s, an aroused citizenry that focused on an evil - legally sanctioned racism - ended racial discrimination under the law and furthered the cause of justice. Today an aroused citizenry focused on an evil - violence - can restore our streets to order and further the cause of liberty. A street thug can intimidate an individual, but he cannot intimidate a unified, energized community.

Politicians have to stop treating security like a product that government delivers to your home. We create security for ourselves in the same context where violence occurs - the family, the community. At the national level, we can set standards, set limits, spread innovative ideas, create uniform rules, gather data, and insure that those who commit federally prohibited violence pay for it by a swift loss of freedom and in some cases, such as drug kingpins who murder, by the loss of their lives. But the real battle against violent crime committed by the young and within the family won't be waged at the federal level. Like education, where the feds have only 6 percent of the resources, in crime the feds have about 13 percent of the nation's crime resources. The crime bill will seem like a false promise if we forget our individual obligations as police officers, local officials, teachers, parents, spouses, and citizens....

The only way to achieve our aim of a 75-percent homicide reduction within a decade and in a way consistent with our democracy is to assume individual responsibility, to enlist all who love their communities and nation in a rebellion that is waged locally, neighbor by neighbor, building by building, and at the same time to build bonds of community that render violence moot....

■

Failed Federal Policies Trigger Local Activists: Concern Over Drugs and Crime Spurs Neighborhood Groups to Come Up with New Answers to Old Problems

by David Holmstrom

Something distinctly apolitical but revolutionary is happening in communities and city neighborhoods around the United States. More and more neighbors are coming together in concerned and determined community groups.

Government entities are being by-passed, and so-called intractable social problems such as drugs, violence, and housing are being dealt with directly.

"What we are seeing is an uneven community-based movement slowly taking responsibility for local problems because the federal government in many of its social programs has been a failure," says Fernando Menendez, director of the Management and Community Development Institute at Tufts University near Boston.

Some social scientists say that despite costing billions of dollars over a generation, many federal social-service programs proved to be only well-meaning palliatives. Top-heavy with bureaucracy, the experts say, and prone to exclude local differences as marginally important, federal programs often surrounded social problems from the top, but had little follow-through or flexibility to remedy them at the bottom.

"There is no doubt that community people who are working to solve some of these problems are acting as if the federal government doesn't exist," says Roger Conner, executive director of the American Alliance for Rights & Responsibilities (AARR) in Washington, D.C. "The federal government is locked into a left and right debate," he says, "which is totally irrelevant now. Most community problem-solvers are nonideological because the problems are so severe."

Although driving drug dealers out of neighborhoods and stopping crime has been the recent impetus for lots of angry single-purpose groups taking back the streets, community-based groups have in fact been part of American communities for years. The difference now is that single and multipurpose nonprofit organizations are close to being the major force in direct problem solving at the local level.

No national statistics exist, but some experts say that as much as 60 percent of the social-service budget of many county and local government agencies are managed now by nonprofit community organizations. A study by the Urban Institute found that as far back as 1979, 55 percent of governmental social services in the US were under contract with private or nonprofit organizations. Another study in New York state disclosed that between 1981 and 1987, employment in nonprofit organizations grew three times as fast as government employment.

This article originally appeared in The Christian Science Monitor, Tuesday, November 30, 1993. Reprinted by permission.

David Holmstrom is a staff writer for The Monitor.

"There are three kinds of organizations," says Mr. Menendez, "those that provide direct services, those that advocate on behalf of a cause, and those that get together to solve their own problems. There is a tremendous demand now for private and public dollars because there is a shift of responsibility without resources. All this started in the Reagan administration when he said many social programs were not the province of government."

But even without resources, concerned neighbors are organizing to improve many unsafe and distressed communities. The growth of community organizations is a return to historic American pragmatism, argues Mr. Conner of AARR, the leading activist group for the "communitarian" movement (representing a balance between individual rights and community responsibility).

"If you go back to historian Alexis de Tocqueville," says Conner, "he concluded that Americans were problem-solvers, not averse to taking things into their own hands. Right up through the progressive era, the proper response was for community volunteers to figure out how to solve problems. Then came the professionalism of social work and the police. Ordinary citizens were told they needed to put problems in the hands of experts who really understand. Give us your money and go back to your private life, is what they said. What we have discovered is that social workers go home at night."

Community problems can be so severe and intertwined that successful community-based organizations, such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in New York, recognize the need to expand their services.

Started by the Ford Foundation in 1979, LISC is the largest community-development support organization in the US, working with 875 community development corporations (CDCs), building houses and raising money to launch other community projects.

In 1992, LISC launched an initiative to help CDCs start to develop strategies that reach beyond housing, such as new business, after-school programs, and combating crime and drugs. "If we peel away the political rhetoric of both parties," states the 1992 LISC annual report, "as the nation moves to retool its urban policy, there is a heartening consensus, a belief that self-help and community initiative must be a crucial component of any new social agenda."

Some social scientists like Menendez think the White House has been preoccupied with health care and international problems. But the staggering problems of inner cities are moving toward the top of the national agenda.

"I think the hole [of social problems] is so deep," Menendez says, "that it is going to take a long time to get out of it. But I think Clinton has the realization that there has to be some kind of an integrated concern and plan. In fairness to Reagan, his administration tried to address the problem and said the federal government can't do all this stuff. But I don't think the solution is the market place, as he did. When the nation was founded, we created the nonprofit sector and said it was exempt from the rules of the market because there are things that need to happen." ■

To Stop Violent Behavior, We Must Start in Early Years

by The Rev. Fred Cloud

We are increasingly concerned, both as individuals and as a society, with the widespread (and often lethal) violence in Nashville and throughout America today. Particularly troubling are violent acts by teenagers, and even pre-teens. But our projected remedies are often "late in the game" of child and youth development.

This was brought home to me several years ago when I took a proposal to Charles Frazier, then director of Metro schools, for a pilot project on teaching middle school students (about 11 to 13 years old) how to respond to conflict situations nonviolently. I had chosen this age group because, according to many teachers, this is when many youth begin to act out aggressively in school.

"That's much too late, Fred," Frazier responded. "We have kids coming into kindergarten at age 5 who will pick up a toy - or even a chair - and hit another kid over the head. You need to start very early if you're going to stop violent behavior!"

His response chilled my blood. The idea that many kids at age 5 are already on a dangerous path that can blight their lives and harm others is shocking; it demands immediate and imaginative response on the part of all caring adults in the community.

As I've talked with family and friends, children's workers and mental health professionals, I've come up with what might be a pragmatic (and financially affordable) approach to meeting this problem head-on: the use of volunteers (especially senior citizens) in church or synagogue settings. This could be a natural and important expansion of the educational missions of most religious groups.

The basic concept is for all of us to take with great seriousness what sociologists describe as *socialization* - the process by which children learn the customs and attitudes of the communities in which they live. I'm convinced that we either socialize children to family, church and community *or* they will inevitably be socialized to "the street" - with violence and death the all-too-common outworking.

We could get such a program going with an initial thrust on three fronts:

- A training program for volunteers (making sure to have trainers who are experts on child development).

- The launching of the program for preschool children (ages 2 to 5), in which volunteers would read to them, teach them songs and teach them to play together nonviolently.

- A simultaneous program for the children's parents on "parenting skills" and "coping skills." This is *not* a babysitting operation! It is an effort to assist parents - especially single parents (and particularly teenage mothers) - in surrounding their children with health-producing activities and relationships.

This approach to socialization of young children is offered as one means of assuring that *all* of America's children have a chance to grow up and develop their talents, and enjoy a violence-free childhood and youth.

Fortunately, millions of American children already experience such a loving, growth-producing human environment. But our lives are so interconnected that callousness or indifference to children in the least privileged settings can produce tragedy for all of us. So we will do well to act on the old motto, "One for all and all for one!" ■

The Rev. Fred Cloud is a Nashville human relations counselor and consultant and former director of the area's Human Relations Commission.

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Resources for further action

Organizations

Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
1225 Eye Street NW, Room 110
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 289-7319; fax (202) 408-1851

A nonprofit education, research, and legal advocacy organization working to reduce gun-related violence. Publishes an array of material on gun control and gun safety. The Center will provide an introductory informational packet.

Center for Media Literacy
1962 S. Shenandoah Street
Los Angeles, CA 90034
(800) 266-9494 or (310) 559-2944; fax (310) 559-9396

A resource center for "media literacy education." Two issues of its *Media&Values* magazine are devoted to the issue of violence in the media, and they form a "short course" on the topic. The pair of issues is available for $7 plus $2 shipping; a study guide is available free with purchase of a set of 10 copies of each issue, priced at $65 plus $5 shipping.

Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence
1914 North 34th Street, Suite 105
Seattle, WA 98103-9058
(206) 634-1903; fax (206) 634-0115

An interreligious, educational ministry that provides educational resources, including videotapes, on the prevention of child abuse and domestic violence. Most of the resources take a nondenominational religious perspective.

National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street NW, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
(202) 466-6272; fax (202) 296-1356

A nonprofit organization whose mission is to enable people to prevent crime and build "safer, more caring communities." Publishes a vast array of books, reports, videotapes, and camera-ready program materials for crime and violence prevention (a full catalogue is available). NCPC also provides training and technical assistance. *Preventing Violence: Program Ideas and Examples* (1992) and *Crime Prevention in America: Foundations for Action* (1990) are particularly helpful.

National League of Cities
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 626-3000; publications (202) 626-3150;
fax (202) 626-3043

Conducts research and offers training, technical assistance, and information to municipal officials to help them improve the quality of local government. Specific to the issue of violence, provides a local organizing handbook as part of a larger campaign titled "Let's Stop Kids Killing Kids." In addition, the NLC "futures process" for 1994 is focused on public safety; a report on community involvement and collaboration on crime and violence, including examples of successful initiatives, will be available at the end of 1994.

North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence
3824 Barrett Drive, Suite 303
Raleigh, NC 27609-7220
(800) 299-6054 or (919) 571-4954; fax (919) 571-4957

The Center's mission is to "provide technical assistance and program development which will involve students in preventing school violence." Provides information on a model "SAVE" program (Students Against Violence Everywhere), a student-led organization that has been adapted for use around the country.

Save Our Sons and Daughters
2441 W. Grand Blvd.
Detroit, MI 48208
(313) 361-5200

SO SAD offers information on violence prevention training and strategy and crisis intervention for survivors of violence.

Study Circles Resource Center
PO Box 203, 697A Pomfret Street
Pomfret, CT 06258
(203) 928-2616; fax (203) 928-3713

In conjunction with this manual, SCRC staff can provide assistance - additional resources, networking, program ideas - to a wide range of institutions that wish to develop small-group discussion programs addressing the issue of violence.

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The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide:

Violence in Our Communities

A program of the Study Circles Resource Center, sponsored by Topsfield Foundation, Inc.

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Ground rules for useful discussions . . . . . inside back cover

Additional copies of ***The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Violence in Our Communities*** are available for $1.00 each, with discounts for orders of 10 or more. Contact the Study Circles Resource Center if your organization or corporation would like information on sponsoring distribution of Busy Citizen's Discussion Guides on violence, racism and race relations, sexual harassment, or civil rights for gays and lesbians.

This booklet is an abbreviated version of ***Confronting Violence in Our Society: A Guide for Involving Citizens in Public Dialogue and Problem Solving***, available for $5.00 from the Study Circles Resource Center.

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Publications of SCRC include topical discussion programs; training material for study circle organizers, leaders, trainers, and writers; a quarterly newsletter; a clearinghouse list of study circle material developed by a variety of organizations; and an annotated bibliography on study circles, collaborative learning, and participatory democracy. Many of these publications are available at no charge. Write or call for more information:

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Introduction

CG

"There's a war on at home. . . . Even outside major cities, ours is a land of real freedom only during daylight and in certain neighborhoods."

Jonathan Alter, *Newsweek*, September 27, 1993

Violence has commanded the attention of the nation, inspiring fear, anger, and grave concern. Though some elected officials are afraid to admit that the criminal justice system by itself can't control violent crime, a growing number of mayors, judges, police chiefs, and others are urging citizens to get involved. Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) has called for a "national rebellion" made up of citizens working against violence at the local level.

The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Violence in Our Communities is designed to help you enter into this national rebellion by joining with others in dialogue about how best to confront crime and violence in your community. It is a brief companion to ***Confronting Violence in Our Society: A Guide for Involving Citizens in Public Dialogue and Problem Solving***.

Both the full discussion guide and this brief Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide are based on the notion of study circles – small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions. Study circles have a venerable history in our nation's town meeting and Chautauqua traditions, and are once again taking root in many organizations and communities as a way to grapple with political and social concerns. They provide an effective vehicle for the kind of dialogue that is essential to confronting violence in our communities.

Can citizens make a difference?

There are important reasons to be confident that citizens *can* make a difference in reducing violence. First, there is an emerging consensus in America about the importance of confronting violence. Though different people emphasize different aspects of the problem – and different solutions – almost everyone agrees that violence *must* be addressed. There is also a growing willingness to face violence openly. Where people might once have been afraid to confront the issue publicly, for fear of harming the local tourism industry or depressing property values,

they are now realizing that something must be done - and that doing something requires broad-based public involvement.

But the greatest reason for hope is that, in the past few years, citizens working together to confront violence have already made a difference in their communities. Citizens, teachers, parents, young people, police, health care workers, elected officials, and other community leaders have designed innovative ways to address many aspects of the violence problem - substance abuse, domestic violence, gang violence, racial conflicts - within the settings of family, schools, social service agencies, religious institutions, and neighborhoods. Each of these approaches plays a part in reducing and preventing violence, provides examples and models for others, and affirms that citizens can indeed make a difference at the local level.

Why talk about violence?

We can't ignore or escape violence; it is spreading to communities that never before had to face it openly.

Working effectively to confront it will require the determined efforts of many citizens over a long period of time. Dialogue will be critical to beginning and sustaining these efforts. People need opportunities to discuss their views of the problem and to hear how their neighbors view and experience the effects of violence. They need to work together to assess the problems of violence, to learn what their own and other communities are doing, and to come up with ways for effectively dealing with the problems. Most importantly, as people meet with and learn from each other, they are building a sense of community that is basic to solving the problem.

Background on the issue

Americans have good reason to be worried about violence. The U.S. leads the industrialized world in violent crime with 3 million victims a year, including 23,000 murder victims. In 1990, local governments alone spent $39.7 billion on the criminal justice system (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992 and 1994).

The national opinion polls on crime and violence, which show how seriously Americans take the issue, reflect the impact it has on peoples' personal lives. Four out of every 10 Americans "have changed their way of living" because of anxiety about crime (*The Christian Science Monitor*, April 8, 1994). People feel less safe in the streets, at school, at work, even in their own homes.

There is concern not only about the general level of violence, but about the particular kinds of violence which are on the rise. The fastest growth in violent crime is occurring among teenagers: From 1986 to 1991, murders committed by teens ages 14 to 17 grew by 124%, while among adults 25 and over, murder actually declined slightly (*Time*, February 7, 1994). Four to five people under 18 are murdered every day, and three to four people under 18 are arrested for murder each day (National Crime Prevention Council). In a 1991 survey, one in five high school students said that they carried a weapon to school at least once a month, for self-protection or use in a fight (Centers for Disease Control).

Violence against women is also a growing concern. A study conducted by the National Victim Center revealed that 1 in 8 adult women has been raped ("Rape in America: A Report to the Nation," April 23, 1992). Reported incidents of domestic violence have surged, with approximately four million women beaten in their homes each year (*The Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 1993). More American lives - mostly women's lives - are lost to domestic violence every five years than in the entire Vietnam war.

Clearly, our freedom, our peace of mind, and our very lives depend upon effectively confronting violence in our communities.

Session 1
How does violence affect our lives?

The purpose of this session is to allow each group member to listen to others' experiences and perceptions. It gives everyone a chance to talk about how violence affects them and to gain a more complete picture of the violence problems our community is facing.

Violence is not always an easy topic to talk about. An understanding of and commitment to the study circle process - open, thoughtful, focused discussion - is essential. The core of the process is respectful listening in order to understand others' points of view.

The questions and cases below provide some starting points for a discussion about how violence affects us and our community.

Questions for beginning the discussion

1. How does the *possibility* of violence change your daily life? How has *direct contact* with violence affected your life?

2. What are your greatest concerns about safety and security, either your own or that of the people close to you?

3. How do you feel about local law enforcement and the protection it provides? Is the system fair to all? How does the way the police operate affect the behavior of people in the community?

4. How do your concerns about violence differ from the concerns your parents had at your age?

5. What do you think are the most serious problems involving violence in our community?

6. What role do you think the media have played in defining and portraying violence in our community?

7. In what ways do you think that citizens can make a real difference in addressing violence? What circumstances would prompt you to become actively involved in anti-violence programs in the community?

8. How does violence particularly affect the young people in our community?

9. How does violence particularly affect the women in our community?

Some cases for discussion

These cases are only brief sketches of some of the kinds of situations citizens face daily in communities all over the country. They are a starting point for thinking about the needs and concerns of people in our own community.

As you read and discuss the following cases, consider these questions: How are the cases similar to situations our community faces? What do you think are the root causes of violence in each case? What could be done to address the causes and to respond to the situation?

Case #1

A group of kids has begun to insult, intimidate, and pick fights with other students during and after school hours. As a result, many students are tense and scared. Some have banded together for protection, and a few have begun to carry knives and even guns. In responding to the situation, a group of parents recently held a meeting and demanded that security in and around the school be increased. But there is no additional money in the school or police budget, and no one wants to raise taxes. The principal, who is concerned about the situation, has suspended the kids who have started the fights in school, but a lot of the incidents happen off school grounds. If you were the parent of a student at the school, what would you do? What would you want your child to do? What advice would you give to him or her?

Case #2

You have lived in the same urban neighborhood for a long time. Recently, you've begun to see a lot of different cars stopping in front of certain houses on your street, with people constantly coming and going. Your neighbor has told you that she has seen drugs and money change hands on the street; in fact, she says that she could identify two people who are selling drugs. One evening, she tells you that she went to a meeting of a new neighborhood group, and that members of the group have asked her to testify in court against the dealers. She is afraid that the dealers may "target" her if she testifies. What do you think your neighbor should do? Is there anything you would suggest to the neighborhood group?

Case #3

Domestic violence has increased dramatically in your small city over the past few years. In the past month, two women have been murdered

by their ex-husbands and several others beaten so badly that they needed treatment at the hospital emergency room. The Women's Commission has good reason to believe that domestic violence is even more frequent, and requests the mayor to call a public meeting to hear suggestions and discuss what can be done to reduce domestic violence. The mayor knows that you are concerned about this issue, and has asked you to express your views at the meeting. What ideas would you suggest for reducing domestic violence?

Case #4

The office where you work is in a large building in an industrial area. The parking lot is large and poorly lit - you're not sure if people are always breaking the floodlights or if the company that owns the office building just isn't concerned about safety. In the last year, two people have been mugged while going to their cars after work. Incidents of "carjacking" have also been increasing in the surrounding area. What would you do, and to whom would you turn for help?

Case #5

Your suburban neighborhood is near a large city, but until the past year, violent crime had not been a major concern. Then, over the summer, several houses were burglarized. Two people walking home from the commuter station at night were assaulted and robbed. The police have arrested suspects in some of the cases, but the police force is small. Recently, the mayor created a Public Safety Committee to study ways to make the community safer. As a member of the committee, what proposals would you promote?

Session 2
What are the reasons for violence in our society?

Violence is a serious problem that makes people want to spring into immediate action. But there is an important role for discussion as a part of action: the discussion process itself builds a network of mutual support and commitment to the community. Discussion also leads to a deeper understanding of the problems and, so, to more effective solutions.

Violence in America: Some international comparisons

The U.S. is by far the most violent industrialized nation in the world, with 3 million victims of violent crime every year and 23,000 murders. The second most violent industrialized nation, Spain, has a murder rate which is half that of ours (Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 1994). In 1993, 455 out of every 100,000 Americans were in jail at one time or another; we are the world leader in this category, with South Africa a distant second at 311 per 100,000 (*Time*, February 7, 1994). Guns are the murder weapon of choice: 10,567 people were killed with them last year in this country, compared with 10 handgun deaths in Australia, 13 in Sweden, 68 in Canada, and 87 in Japan (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1991).

Violence:
The public health approach

A growing number of violence experts have begun to characterize violence as a public health problem. Instead of blaming everything on a single root cause, the public health approach views a violent event as the outcome of many different causes over a long period of time.

This approach cuts across all five perspectives, and borrows ideas for solutions from each. It assumes that no single strategy will eliminate all violence, but that the chain of events leading to an act of violence can be broken at any of several links.

Advocates of the public health approach argue that anti-violence programs and approaches should be integrated and coordinated as a comprehensive strategy with many small constituent parts. Study circles are an ideal complement to this approach, since they bring the ideas and efforts of many different citizens to the mosaic of ongoing community efforts that the public health approach promotes.

However, international comparisons don't provide simple answers to the question of *why* violence occurs. For example, some argue that the prevalence of guns in this country is the cause, yet owning a gun is even more common in Switzerland than in the U.S., while their rates of handgun death - 91 per year - are much lower than ours. Some have explained American violence by noting other supposed differences between us and the rest of the world: we are less religious than other countries; we have more large cities; we are more competitive; we are less homogeneous and so have more clashes between different cultures. Yet rates of violent crime are higher in the American South than in the North, and the South would seem to be more religious, less urban, less competitive, and more homogeneous. There are no easy answers to the question of why the U.S. is more violent than many other countries.

Drugs, alcohol, and violence

All explanations of the violence problem touch in some way on alcohol and drug abuse. While not explicit in Perspective 2, for example, substance abuse might be seen as a final link in the chain of events leading to a violent incident. This idea could be supported by a 1990 study showing that one out of three victims of violent crimes claimed their assailant was under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or both (National Institute of Justice, February 1994).

The other perspectives in this session would emphasize the abuse of illegal drugs, and would describe that as a major symptom of the root causes and a uniquely complicating factor in its own right. For example, 39% of the murders committed in New York City in 1988 occurred during drug transactions (Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 1992).

Very different proposals emerge from these perspectives, ranging from escalating the "war on drugs" to legalizing certain drugs. Sessions 3 and 4 describe community-based approaches to substance abuse.

Five perspectives on the reasons for violence in America

Rather than just compare the U.S. to less violent countries, it is important to try to understand the roots of our problem with violence and find ways to solve it. The five perspectives that follow offer a way to begin that discussion: they represent some of the most common explanations of our current problems with violence.

Each of the perspectives is an interpretation of the problem, a lens through which to view violence. The five lenses aren't necessarily mutually exclusive; you might find yourself drawing some elements from all or some of them. And because each depicts a broad view, each per-

spective could lead to a wide variety of action steps, some of which may directly conflict with one another. For example, looking at violence as primarily a problem of "law and order" (as in the fourth perspective) could lead to very different recommendations regarding handguns.

As you read and discuss the perspectives, consider these questions:

1. What do you think are the most important reasons for violence in America?

2. Are there perspectives not represented here that you think better account for why our society is so violent?

3. What role do drugs and alcohol play? What role do handguns play?

4. Some people believe that a moral or spiritual breakdown in our communities accounts for our problem with violence. How does this fit with your views?

5. Why is domestic violence so prevalent? Has it been getting worse, or are people just more aware of it now?

6. What do you think has led to the increase in violence in schools and among young people?

7. What general direction should we take for reducing violence in America? What are the greatest benefits we would derive from taking that direction? What kinds of sacrifices or costs could that direction require?

Guns and violence

The handgun debate dominates much of what we read and hear about how to solve the violence problem.

Gun control advocates assert that fewer firearms on the street mean fewer and less severe crimes. Handgun rights supporters claim that gun control takes firearms out of the hands of honest citizens and leaves criminals armed to the teeth.

There are powerful arguments on both sides, and the debate has been polarized for a long time. Few people really think that either outlawing all guns or making sure everyone has one and knows how to use it would render us a peaceful society overnight. And with the current stalemate over this issue, neither option seems likely to happen anytime soon.

The handgun debate has diverted attention from other aspects of the violence problem. While gun-related solutions (pro or con) may be part of the answer, most people see violence as a more complicated issue requiring more than one simple solution.

Perspective 1 – Violence occurs because of family and community breakdowns.

According to this perspective, community customs and standards once assured civility, discipline, and respect for authority. Violence was held in check by social principles and a sense of membership and belonging. Parents, extended family members, and neighbors cared for children, served as role models, and enforced codes of conduct. Cops "walked the beat" and institutions such as churches and schools provided communities with spiritual support, moral guidance, and a sense of discipline. Today, many children lack these influences. Many Americans don't feel ties to their community, don't live near other relatives, and don't know their neighbors very well. We should work to strengthen our families and communities.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Create or join neighborhood efforts such as community policing, crime watch, or community patrol.
- Make the school the hub of the community - hold community meetings there and get adults involved with students in the school.
- Look after kids in the neighborhood - by sharing child care or volunteering in programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters.
- Support a return to "old-fashioned values" in schools, with dress codes, the pledge of allegiance, prayer in the classrooms, and strictly enforced rules that compel respect for authority.
- Join a local community organization such as a neighborhood council, church group, Little League, parent-teacher association, or volunteer fire department.
- Support stricter enforcement of child support laws, so that "deadbeat parents" can't avoid their obligations.
- Join or start a support group for parents.
- Take part in programs that give citizens a voice in envisioning and planning the community's future.
- Promote substance abuse education and prevention, particularly for children.

Perspective 2 – Violence stems from pervasive cultural messages.

According to this perspective, violence is everywhere. You can't turn on your television, listen to the radio, read a novel, or even get into a conversation without encountering gratuitous violence or references to it. Most children will watch thousands of violent acts on TV before they reach the age of ten, but will not be exposed to nearly as many examples of people resolving their conflicts peacefully. Pornographic material portraying violence against women is freely available. These cultural messages convince people that violence is a legitimate option in many situations. The more pervasive violence becomes, the more "instinctive" it seems and the tougher it becomes to even know *how* to act constructively when a conflict arises. We should work to curb violent messages and provide people - especially kids - with tools for resolving conflicts peacefully.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Monitor and lower children's exposure to violence on television and in the movies.
- Create or support community mediation centers, which help to resolve disputes in schools and neighborhoods.
- Encourage local TV, radio, and newspapers to cover more of the positive events in the community, and to air public service announcements about anti-violence programs in the community.
- Support an expanded rating system for recordings to warn parents about violent lyrics.
- Restrict access to pornographic materials, and ban pornography that portrays violence against women.
- Punish fighting in sports at all levels; encourage good sportsmanship.
- Learn how to deal comfortably with racial, religious, gender, and other differences, and help teach others.
- Incorporate violence prevention and conflict resolution programs into the school curriculum.
- Help educate people about the connection between alcohol and violence, and ban alcohol on college campuses.
- Help educate people about the violent messages that war toys send.

Perspective 3 – Violence stems from the breakdown of cities.

According to this perspective, violence is not a disease randomly spread throughout society; it is linked mainly to intensifying inner-city problems. The more poverty, overcrowding, hunger, drug abuse, and gang activity there is in a community, the more violence there will be. Social and economic hardships have combined to create a culture of anger, helplessness, hopelessness, and despair in the inner city. Drug abuse and the drug trade represent the "last straw" in this process of breakdown. The young men who commit a large part of the violence are living by a grim street code that requires brutality and retribution in order to prove manhood and maintain respect. Violence is their only way to ensure that drug deals and other illegal agreements are carried out. We can't build walls around the inner city, so it is for the sake of all of society that we must solve the problems there.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Support economic development programs that increase employment opportunities in the inner city.
- Create or support a neighborhood program – for example, in the church, synagogue, mosque, local school, or community center – that reaches out to young people, teaches them about the dangers of gangs and drugs, helps give them positive peer and community support, and sponsors activities such as sports and music.
- Support assigning more police to the inner city and using the National Guard when necessary.
- Support community policing in inner cities.
- Promote treatment, detoxification, and counseling for alcoholics and drug addicts.
- Advocate the use of affirmative action to increase employment opportunities for minorities and those who live in poverty.
- Support local institutions in the inner city that cultivate racial and class consciousness and increase residents' political, social, and economic power.
- Legalize certain drugs, so that government can regulate the drug trade much as it does with alcohol, thus reducing violence.
- Support early intervention programs for young families.
- Advocate "regionalism": expand the tax base so that everyone who lives near a city (and therefore benefits by it) helps pay the cost of dealing with its problems.

Perspective 4 – Violence is due to a lack of "law and order."

According to this perspective, our society has become much more lenient than it used to be. Instead of swift and sure punishment, people who commit crimes know there is only a slim chance they will be arrested, convicted, and put in jail. Part of this is because the criminal justice system is overwhelmed and sometimes inefficient, but part of it is also due to excessive lenience. Even murderers receive furloughs or are paroled in just a few years. In schools, teachers are forced to put up with classroom behavior that would have been unacceptable in past generations. We don't do nearly enough to deter either children or adults from violence, to show them what the consequences are and make them "face the music" if they do something wrong. We should reinforce law and order by making rules and laws tougher and by strictly enforcing them.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Enact and enforce tougher sentencing for violent criminals and drug offenders - for example, by putting three-time offenders in jail for life.
- Acknowledge police brutality as a form of lawlessness, and call for the prosecution of the officers who practice it.
- Approve spending to hire more police and judges, build more jails, and send juvenile offenders to "boot camps."
- Support the use of mandatory drug tests to screen students and employees.
- Support vigorous enforcement of gun control laws to make it more difficult and expensive to obtain firearms.
- Encourage law-abiding citizens to arm themselves, and teach them how to use guns in self-defense.
- Support a return to "old-fashioned values" in the schools, with dress codes, the pledge of allegiance, prayer in the classrooms, and strictly enforced rules that require respect for authority figures.
- Learn martial arts and other self-defense skills.

Perspective 5 – Violence results from inequities and injustices.

According to this perspective, it is revealing that the victims of violence tend to be members of certain groups. These people - those who are poor, people of color, and women - are the very ones that have the least political, social, and economic power. They are more likely to live in violent environments - dangerous urban ghettos, abusive intimate relationships, impoverished Native American reservations, and the like. Though they experience different types of injustice, they all suffer to some degree from lack of opportunity, messages of hopelessness and resignation, the intolerance of others, and physical aggression. The deep frustration of people who feel powerless can in turn lead *them* to lash out in violence against their families, members of their community, and the "outside world." The justice system merely reinforces these inequities and injustices by giving harsher sentences to minority defendants, publicly questioning the character of rape victims, and giving police brutality "a slap on the wrist." The problem of violence will not be solved until the members of these groups have social, political, and economic equality.

Ways to address violence that this perspective might suggest:

- Demand an end to police brutality and discrimination, and develop ways to make officers accountable to the neighborhoods they serve.
- Demand that the police department educate its street officers in racial awareness and prejudice reduction.
- Support affirmative action to obtain fair representation in business and civil service, and create council and congressional districts that make the election of black and Hispanic candidates more likely.
- Support community development programs that provide credit and capital to poor, female, and minority citizens who want to start businesses or buy homes.
- Advocate "regionalism": expand the tax base so that cities and suburbs, often divided along race and class lines, will share the costs as well as the benefits of urban centers.
- Launch a campaign against domestic violence, and educate health care workers and others to recognize and help women deal with it.
- Cultivate racial, class, and gender consciousness, and increase the political, social, and economic power of women, minorities, and those who live in poverty.
- Demand equity in school funding so that per-pupil classroom expenditures in poorer school districts equal those in wealthier districts.
- Promote treatment, detoxification, and counseling for alcoholics and drug addicts.
- Advocate the strict enforcement of fair housing laws.

Session 3
What can we do in our neighborhoods?

Violence has become a public concern in more neighborhoods than ever before. The purpose of this session is to develop ideas for preventing and reducing violence in our neighborhoods.

Note that though some of the approaches described in this session involve police or other law enforcement professionals, it is the level of citizen commitment, support, and participation that determines their success.

Community action: A "national rebellion against violence"

It is an American tradition for neighbors to come together to figure out how to solve problems. Unfortunately, when it comes to public issues, too many Americans have become alienated from government. They view government as a provider of services or a faceless bureaucracy that doesn't care to hear their opinions - "citizens" have become "clients" of the government. But, with violence and other signs of social distress on the rise in our communities, both citizens and government officials are realizing that the public must get involved.

In recent years, the violence problem has motivated a growing number of communities to act on that realization. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, there are well over 5,000 local community crime prevention programs in the nation. Those programs give credence to the idea that the best solution to violence is for citizens to meet on a regular basis, address the problems, devise their own creative approaches, and work together to build a cohesive community.

In May of 1994, Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey lent his voice to this idea by calling for citizen participation in a "national rebellion" against violence:

> "The only way to achieve our aim of a 75-percent homicide reduction within a decade and in a way consistent with our democracy is to assume individual responsibility to enlist all who love their communities and nation in a rebellion that is waged locally, neighbor by neighbor, building by building, and at the

same time to build bonds of community that render violence moot."

The fifteen approaches to violence listed in this session are examples of this kind of rebellion. The list is not comprehensive or detailed, but it provides a starting point for thinking about methods we might want to initiate or build on in our community.

As you read and discuss the approaches in this session, consider these questions:

1. What are the main problems relating to violence in our neighborhood?

2. How have these problems developed over time? What does that mean about what we should do?

3. What is already going on in our neighborhood in terms of violence prevention and crime reduction? How can we assist in these efforts?

4. How have communities similar to ours effectively addressed problems like the ones we face? What can we learn from those efforts about new efforts we could initiate here? What do we need to research further?

5. What can we do about the specific threats faced by women in our neighborhood?

6. What first steps do we want to take? What type of support or help do we need to take these steps?

Fifteen approaches to reducing neighborhood violence

1) Conflict resolution. Disputes and tensions often fester because people see no effective way to resolve them. Communities can strengthen the abilities of their members to peacefully resolve problems by establishing conflict resolution and mediation programs that teach these skills and promote their use.

- San Francisco's Community Board program uses 300 volunteer mediators across the city to practice "neighborhood conciliation," handling cases brought to them by police, small claims courts, and city agencies.

2) Positive activities for young people. Communities have almost unlimited options when it comes to devising constructive activities for

young people. These after-school, evening, and weekend programs give kids positive experiences in sports, business, the arts, and other areas. Service programs, in particular, lead students to understand their own effectiveness and place in the community.

- Milwaukee's Centro de la Comunidad Unida (United Community Center) sponsors basketball games from 8 p.m. until midnight, "when young people are most likely to be drinking or otherwise getting into trouble."

3) Drug and alcohol abuse prevention, treatment, and counseling. Many communities have seized upon reducing drug and alcohol abuse as a way of reducing violence. There are a great variety of programs neighborhoods can employ, including community-wide education efforts, counseling and support groups, "twelve-step" self-help programs like AlAnon, and treatment programs using drugs like methadone.

- The Neighborhood Support Centers in Little Rock, Arkansas, provide support services - including counseling, support groups, temporary shelter, and job training - to people who are on waiting lists for treatment programs or who are graduating from these programs.

4) Neighborhood crime watches. Effective neighborhood watch programs increase the reporting of violent crime and create an environment that deters crimes. Neighborhoods can strengthen their watch programs through extensive crime education programs (teaching people how to identify and describe incidents) and communications networks (such as a separate telephone number or radio channel) so that reporting is quicker and more effective.

- Boston's Senior Crime and Violence Prevention Project has helped police apprehend muggers and burglars through their Neighborhood Watch groups.

5) Neighborhood crime patrols. Citizens can go beyond merely reporting crimes and actually take to the streets to deter crime. Crime patrols can be very aggressive, holding nighttime marches or carrying video cameras around the neighborhood to record and disrupt prostitution and drug dealing. Or, they can take a subtler approach, persuading and assisting dealers and gang members to change their lifestyles.

- Reverend Charles Jones' aggressive patrol program in Macon, Georgia, reduced violent crime in the neighborhood by 23% and reduced calls for police service by 61%.

6) Community policing. Community policing assigns officers to a "beat" in a certain neighborhood, giving citizens the opportunity to make them part of the community. As opposed to merely responding to violence, police become preventers of violence by responding to residents' needs, gathering crime prevention information, serving as role models for young people, and developing a cooperative relationship with people in the neighborhood.

Potential Anti-Violence Allies

citizens
community groups
police departments
local governments
churches
universities
community colleges
local schools
hospitals
social service agencies
student groups

- Providence, Rhode Island, has a successful community policing program in which officers work out of storefront offices in every neighborhood.

7) Education to improve race relations. Tensions between different ethnic and religious groups can incite or aggravate violence. There are effective ways citizens can address these tensions, from discussion programs to diversity seminars to cultural exchanges.

- The Los Angeles Black-Korean Alliance conducts cultural and pulpit exchanges, conflict mediation, and community meetings that explore ways to resolve cultural tension.

8) Parent education and support. Single parents, professional couples, and other parents have increasingly turned to parent education, training, counseling, and support groups. These services can be offered by schools, churches, universities, hospitals, nonprofit organizations, counseling centers, community groups, and government agencies.

- Parents Anonymous of Massachusetts offers counseling, a telephone hotline, and classes about fostering discipline and self-esteem in children.

9) Public information campaigns. Communities can use public information campaigns to address violence in general, or to specifically target street crime, domestic violence, or child abuse. These campaigns, which require the participation of a large number of citizens and organizations,

work by increasing public awareness of the problem and advertising prevention techniques.

- The Sheriff's Department in Des Moines, Iowa, employs the local AARP, YMCA/ YWCA, PTA, Boy Scouts, and Salvation Army, along with McDonald's, Hardee's, Wal-Mart, and Sears outlets, to spread crime prevention information.
- San Diego has a very active domestic violence awareness program: there are even billboards about domestic violence on the sides of buses. The domestic violence homicide rate has dropped 61% in two years.

10) Social services to prevent domestic violence. Communities can aid the victims of domestic violence not only by creating and supporting shelters for battered women, but by providing counseling services, support groups, legal aid, and child support.

- A Latina women's association in Chicago created a domestic violence program to enhance victims' self-esteem and coordinate the services they need. The program reaches 40 new women each month.

11) Social services to prevent child abuse. Nurses and social workers can visit homes to help detect and prevent child abuse. They can also counsel parents on how to prevent abusive situations from developing.

- The Violence Intervention Project for Children in Hartford, Connecticut, maintains a child abuse prevention staff. The staff is always on call so that they can make a home visit soon after an abusive incident is reported by police or neighbors.

12) Coordinated professional responses to violence. When police, courts, school officials, and other professionals see only their own sphere, no one sees the whole picture. Communities can use professional alliances to reduce this tendency. The police department, district attorney's office, and school administration can pool information in order to identify and keep track of first-time offenders, gang members, ex-convicts, and other people considered likely to commit crimes.

- Middlesex County, Massachusetts, has a criminal justice partnership in which school officials, police, and prosecutors share information on priority cases and devise joint strategies to keep repeat offenders off the streets.

- The Mental Health Association of Montgomery County, Maryland, organized a conference that brought together police, school counselors, social service workers, and juvenile justice system staff to coordinate child abuse identification and prevention efforts.

13) Volunteer police. Police departments can designate and train citizens as an official supplementary police force. Volunteers' duties increase the crime-prevention manpower of the community and help to bridge the gap between police and citizens.

- The Citizens Foot Patrol in Portland, Oregon, puts volunteers on the streets 24 hours a day; there has been a 80% crime reduction in the neighborhood where the Patrol operates.

14) Gun buy-backs and public information campaigns. Many communities have used public information and gun "buy-back" campaigns to persuade people in their communities to give up handguns. By persuading people that guns are too prevalent, these efforts may lead to more restrictive legislation, but their most direct effect is to get guns off the streets and out of homes, and to discourage people from buying more guns.

- New York City's gun buy-back campaign rewarded people who turned in handguns with tickets to New York Knicks games.

15) Handgun safety and awareness. Training citizens to use handguns safely and wisely can be done at the community level. While both supporters and opponents of gun control might support this concept, their training programs reflect different attitudes toward handguns.

- To reduce reckless handling of firearms, the *Orlando Sentinel* and the Orlando Police Department organized a program that trained more than 2,500 people to shoot.
- The Pediatricians' Project of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence works with health professionals to alert parents to the dangers posed by keeping a gun at home.

Session 4
What can we do in our schools?

The growing incidence of youth crime and gun possession and the local reality of escalating school violence of all kinds - from fistfights and sexual harassment to shootings - has prompted many parents and other citizens to take action against violence in the schools.

The purpose of this session is to develop ideas about concrete steps we can take - as parents, teachers, students, concerned citizens, and members of community organizations - to make our schools safer and to effectively use them in the fight against youth violence.

Defending our most important institution

There are well-established ways for parents to become involved in the schools, including parent-teacher associations, booster clubs, and other groups. Parents, grandparents, and other citizens regularly contribute to schools by coaching sports teams, mentoring and tutoring students, and participating in class activities. A renewed commitment to the spirit and practice of parent involvement in schools is needed now more than ever to counteract the violence in our schools.

Some of the most successful approaches to school violence are described in this session. Of course, no single program can solve the problem - as many educators assert, concerned parents and citizens must work with teachers and administrators to develop a caring community in which people work to develop creative solutions to violence.

As you read and discuss the ten approaches in this session, consider these questions:

1. What are the main problems relating to violence in our community's schools?

2. How have these problems developed over time? What does that mean about what we should do?

3. What is already going on in our community's schools to address violence? How can we assist in these efforts?

4. How have schools similar to ours effectively addressed problems like the ones we face? What can we learn from these efforts about new programs we can initiate here? What do we need to research further?

5. What first steps do we want to take? What type of support or help do we need to take these steps?

Ten approaches to preventing or reducing violence in our schools

1) Violence prevention education. A curriculum developed by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith of the Harvard Medical School shows students that violence isn't inevitable. It has been used around the country, and some communities have created their own versions. Some take this approach with very young children, in the belief that violence is learned very early on. In conjunction with putting a curriculum in place, some schools identify and work closely with students who are most at risk.

- The Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in Seattle helps children learn social skills that reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior.

2) Peer mediation. When it comes to resolving conflicts, young people often react most positively to their peers. Some schools take advantage of this by training students to mediate disputes. Students, teachers, administrators, and even police can make referrals to peer mediators.

- The peer mediation program at DuVal High in Prince George's County, Maryland, has reduced suspensions and fights by half since its inception three years ago.

3) Positive adult role models. Schools can bring in many different people as role models - such as parents, community activists, police officers, businesspeople, and athletes. It is important for adults to talk to younger people, listen to them, and to establish relationships with them.

- The Jacksonville, Florida Sheriff's Office has a Youth Intervention Program which links 12- to 18-year-olds with police officers who can build relationships with them.
- The North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence administers a School Resource Officer program in which police officers are assigned to full-time teaching positions in schools,

instructing kids in substance abuse prevention, conflict mediation, and law enforcement procedures.

4) Child abuse awareness and prevention. Schools can make reducing child abuse an important and prominent public priority. Regular appointments with nurses at the schools can aid in the detection of abuse. Schools can train teachers, parents, and students to identify signs of abuse, or to show students what to do if they themselves are being abused.

- The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse runs a "Spider-Man" program in which the comic book hero makes presentations to kids on how to protect themselves and each other from abuse.

5) Peer leadership. Some of the most positive and compelling role models for young people are older students. Students can be trained to share their wisdom with classrooms of younger kids, or to mentor younger kids in one-on-one situations. Older students usually know the plight of younger students better than anyone else.

- The Peer Leadership Program, managed by the student government at Kennedy High School in Plainview-Old Bethpage, New York, trains students in teaching skills, interacting with younger children, and preventing crime. The students who are trained then teach elementary students.

6) Increased security and order at school. Parents can help their schools keep control of the building by volunteering to patrol hallways and routes to school. Police officers and metal detectors on campus can aid physical safety; also, schools can create an atmosphere of discipline and order by requiring students to promptly remove graffiti, enforcing stricter rules on gang-related clothing, and setting well-defined standards for respectful behavior and language.

- In New York City, violent incidents in schools with metal detectors have declined by 58% since the devices were introduced in 1988.

7) Race relations education. Schools can respond to the racial and ethnic tension that sometimes leads to violence by creating programs which teach students how to handle cultural differences. Students can study other cultures, learn about each others' backgrounds, talk openly about differences and commonalities, and have after-school opportunities to interact with people of different racial and ethnic groups.

- Students at Newton North High in Massachusetts formed Ethos for Equality, which coordinates leadership retreats, forums, workshops, and mediation programs focusing on cultural differences.

8) Gun safety and awareness. Children are often unaware of the importance of gun safety. Schools and communities can teach young people what to do when they come into contact with firearms. Training can decrease the risk of accidents involving young people and foster a responsible attitude toward handguns throughout life.

- The Dade County (Florida) Gun Safety Awareness Program provides students in all grades with skills and procedures for avoiding firearm accidents.

9) Substance abuse education and prevention. Schools can choose from a variety of successful substance abuse programs. Minimizing substance abuse among young people reduces violence in two ways: it diminishes one of the most common contributing factors in violent incidents, and it decreases the demand on which violent drug dealers thrive.

- Teens Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse is a program in the Evansville, Indiana, junior high schools in which teenagers use puppet shows to teach elementary school children about substance abuse.

10) Targeting gang violence. In a growing number of schools - urban, suburban, and rural - youth gangs are the most destructive symptom of the violence problem. By explicitly addressing gang violence, schools can combine a variety of approaches into a comprehensive gang prevention plan.

- The Youth Gang Unit in the Cleveland Public Schools serves as a specialized resource team. It educates students and parents on gang prevention, administers constructive after-school activities for students, and serves as a liaison between the police department and the school system.

Ground rules for useful discussions

This section offers some brief suggestions for useful discussions about social and political issues. Some people say that, in this age of television and busy lives, our conversation skills leave something to be desired. Still, the art of conversation can be revived with practice.

Whether you are talking with close friends or casual acquaintances, effective communication requires that you respect others and take their ideas seriously - even when you think they are dead wrong.

Talk about public issues can bring out strong emotions, because many of our beliefs are a large part of how we identify ourselves. You can respect another's feelings without necessarily agreeing with the conclusions that person has come to.

There are no sure-fire rules, but applying some basic principles will make your conversations more productive, satisfying, and enjoyable. Though many of these ground rules seem common-sensical, we all know that in practice they are not so commonly applied!

- Listen carefully to others. Try to really understand what they are saying and respond to it, especially when their ideas differ from your own. Try to avoid building your own arguments in your head while others are talking.
- Think together about what you want to get out of your conversation.
- Be open to changing your mind; this will help you really listen to others' views.
- When disagreement occurs, keep talking. Explore the disagreement. Search for the common concerns beneath the surface. Above all, be civil.
- Value one another's experiences, and think about how they have contributed to your thinking.
- Help to develop one another's ideas. Listen carefully and ask clarifying questions.
- Don't waste time arguing about points of fact; for the time being, you may need to agree to disagree and then move on. You might want to check out the facts before your next conversation.
- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the conversation.

The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Violence in Our Communities is designed to help you have more productive conversations on one of the most difficult issues our nation faces. It can serve as the basis for informal discussions whenever you have the opportunity to talk, or it can serve as a handout for more formal discussion programs. The booklet is balanced in its presentation of ideas, and offers suggestions for discussing several aspects of violence.

The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), producer of this Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide, is a project of Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC carries out this mission by promoting the use of small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions known as study circles.

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